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J. A. K. S.

KĀMARŪPA ANUSANDHĀNA SAMITI

( ASSAM RESEARCH SOCIETY )

GAUHATI : ASSAM

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*Editor : P. C. Choudhury*

**KĀMARŪPA ANUSANDHĀNA SAMITI**  
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"The main object of the Samiti shall be to carry on researches in matters relating to History, Archaeology, Ethnography, etc., that is, all that usually come under the purview of a Research Society, to publish a Journal and other works, and to collect books, manuscripts, coins, copper-plates, statues, carved stones, anthropological articles etc., that is, all things that should find their places in a library and a Museum of such a Society ; and to organise seminar, lecture, tour ; to confer titles and to carry on such other activities in promoting the interest of the society."

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# Editorial

The publication of this issue of the Journal has been much delayed due to the Samiti's paucity of funds and the abnormal situation obtaining in Assam for the last one year or so under which the Publishers and the Printers had to work.

The volume contains mostly papers read at the last Seminar, held in September 1978 under the auspices of this Society, and funds forthcoming, the rest of the papers along with a few others are expected to be brought out in the next issue of the Journal. As I pointed out on earlier occasions, we have not been able to make issues of the Journal more attractive due to dearth of articles based on fundamental research, and I therefore extend again our appeal to the scholars from the North-Eastern region with five Universities and those from outside to contribute such papers on varied disciplines which might make this organ of research studies a really standard one.

The Journal, it may be stated here, from its very inception, has been serving the cause of historical research and of humanism, but no less contribution has it made to the dissemination of knowledge about Assam, and its cultural heritage outside Assam, to finding out missing links between regions and establishing close relationship between different parts of India, thereby enhancing the prospect of national unity and integrity through Indological studies. This sense of oneness, of Indianness, as was supreme in the minds of our ancient authors, echoed and re-echoed in their wealth of literary treasures, from Assam as well as from the other parts of the country, needs revitalisation, that may be done by a class of writers who might pay their devoted attention to the vital present day problems affecting the Nation's destiny with their grounding in the adequate knowledge of the facets of India's glorious cultural tradition, we take pride in and the world at large has lent its recognition to.

But the makers of history of today and of the nation, I mean a set of politicians and the administrators from Assam or elsewhere,

are seen to have been apathetic to Indian polity and cultural tradition and to emergence of a broad composite entity through centuries of evolution out of the patterns, marked by distinctiveness in each region of the country. The pity is, they don't know that they don't know : they don't know that the stronger and resourceful are the parts, the more wholesome becomes the body. The fact is, at no time in the history of Assam has this State with her inhabitants suffered so much and underwent a long period of neglect and exploitation as under Independent India. Historians, and a select few others from this region, have, however, occasionally raised their fingers and reminded them that Assam has been physically cut into pieces, measures seem to have cunningly been devised to divide her people on ethnic, religious and linguistic lines, their voice muffled, and ills allowed to be multiplied, creating conditions in which they apprehend that they would sooner or later lose their hearth and home. The situation at present is such that there is the danger again of the 'cutting of the Melon' to the extent of dropping of the very name Assam and of effacing the vehicle of expression, that is Assamese, though enshrined in our sacred Republican Constitution. Such is the tragedy of the people who have been noted for their contribution to India's struggle for independence against the British masters and their accommodative spirit of hospitality, to which pages of history bear eloquent testimony, that they have been charged with parochiality and un-Indianism, the unkindest cut of all indeed.

There have been occasions, chosen by the interested parties, to dub the Assamese as agitators and what not, and the last one is provided by the movement, started here for their very survival in the midst of a seriously hostile atmosphere. Though such a perilous situation has been created by the influx of foreign nationals to undivided Assam much prior to 1947, no less awful scene to this tragic drama has been added by a class of our own people, a section of the Indians who have been dreaming of establishing their hegemony over the carcas of Balkanised Assam and by the selfseeking politicians, who should be considered as the real, potential enemies of the Indian citizens and of the Union.

Let Assam be relieved of the long period of trial, turmoil and privations from which her innocent people have been suffering by prompt actions from the side of the Government to enable them to enjoy unfettered democratic rights and uniformly equal privileges as those from the other States of the Indian Union and to feel that

they have in store more precious things than they have lost and that their just demands will be met.

I would not have made mention of the above burning problem facing the Assamese people, had it not been a very grave one, assuming national, rather international character, both politically and culturally. Though not out of place, I would like to crave the pardon of the readers for any irrelevancy, that the editorial may have brought to surface. Let me now take this opportunity of conveying our gratitude to the State Education Department for placing the requisite funds at our disposal for bringing out this issue of the Journal. We are also grateful to the I. C. H. R. for their financial help rendered to our Society for holding seminars from time to time. They may be pleased to enhance the grant-in-aid in the interest of this Research organisation. My thanks are also due to all contributors of papers and to the Saraighat Printers for printing this issue of the Journal.

Gauhati  
Nov., 1980

Pratap Ch. Choudhury  
Editor





## THE DESTRUCTION OF THE KĀMĀKHYĀ TEMPLE AS REFERRED TO IN THE YOGINĪTANTRA

Sri Biswanarayan Shastri, Kavyatirtha

In the 12th *pātala* of the first part of the *Yoginītantra* we get a reference to the destruction of the temple of Kāmākhyā. It says that once bolders had fallen on *svargadvāra* (an outer gate of the temple of Kāmākhyā) and also on the *gopura* (the ornamented main gate-way to the temple) and as a result, the temple of Kāmākhyā was destroyed (*Svarga-dvāra śilāpāte Kāmākhyāyā maṭhe bhagne.*)

The above reference is in the context of the curse by the sage Vasiṣṭha on the goddess Kāmākhyā. After the curse was pronounced by the sage Vasiṣṭha, Kāmākhyā disappeared from the *yonīmaṇḍala*.

Before going to the story narrated in the *Yoginītantra* it is necessary to state briefly the traditional belief associated with the destruction of the temple and also to the historical evidence as to the reconstruction of the temple. It will be seen that though the inscriptions inside the temple give an account of the construction (not re-construction) of the temple, they are silent about the destruction.

According to the traditional belief Kālāpāhār, a Brahmin renegade and an iconoclast destroyed the temple of Kāmākhyā on Nilācala and the temple of Hayagrīva-Mādhava on Manikūṭa at Hājo. It is to be examined if this traditional belief is supported by any historical evidence direct or indirect, or circumstantial.

The redoutable Kālāpāhār or Kālu Khān was the General of Sulaiman Kararani of Bengal who reigned from 1563 to 1572 A.D. If Kālāpāhār had at all invaded Assam and carried on the mass scale destruction of the temples, the time for such invasion cannot be later than 1565 A.D., because the temple of Kāmākhyā was rebuilt in *S'aka* 1487 i.e. 1565 A.D. From the inscriptions found inside the Kāmākhyā temple and in Hayagrīva-Mādhava it is known that the Kāmākhyā temple was rebuilt by Malladeva, better known as Naranarāyaṇa, the King of Kochbehar, in *S'aka* 1487 i.e. 1565 A.D. and the temple of Hayagrīva-Mādhava in *Śaka* 1505 i.e. 1583 A.D. by Raghudeva, the nephew of Malladeva.

It seems that the temple of Kāmākhyā was rebuilt just after its destruction if any, and the temple of Hayagrīva-Mādhava after nineteen or twenty years of its destruction. If both the temples had been destroyed by Kālāpāhār, he must have done it in one and the same invasion in between 1563-65 A. D. After the re-construction of Kāmākhyā temple in 1565 the destruction of the temple of Hayagrīva-Mādhava cannot take place. The rebuilt temple of Kāmākhyā, in such an event, could not have escaped destruction by Kālāpāhār.

A number of questions arise in regard to the invasion by Kālāpāhār and the subsequent destruction of the temples.

During the period of the supposed invasion of Kālāpāhār (1563-65 A. D.) Malladeva was the king of Kochbehar and he wielded great power over his kingdom and the adjacent regions, as his suzerainty had been accepted by the kings of the neighbouring countries. The invading army led by Kālāpāhār from Bengal had to cross the Koch Kingdom before reaching Hājo and Gauhati. Without defeating the reigning King or entering into an alliance with him no invader could cross a country.

At the present state of our knowledge we do not find any record or reference of the said invasion in the annals or historical documents. Neither the stone ramparts nor the ruins of the forts and temples speak anything about this. It is to be recalled that every Moughal and Pāthān invasion of Assam has been recorded in the chronicles. The invasion of Md. Ibn Bakhtyar which took place in Śaka 1127 i. e. 1206 A. D<sup>1</sup> has been inscribed on a rock on the bank of the Brahmaputra and the invasion of Syed Feroz, the General of Aurengzeb, and that he was killed in the battle are also found inscribed on a stone rampart. The complete silence about the invasion of Kālāpāhār raises our doubt about it.

The next question is, if both the temples were destroyed why the temple of Kāmākhyā alone was taken up for re-construction by Malladeva or his brother Śukladdhvaja and the temple of Hayagrīva-Mādhava was left out, which was never reconstructed by the two brothers in their lifetime? Why is this preference for Kāmākhyā temple? Is it due to the religious sentiment? The religious faith of the two brothers speak otherwise.

Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva, the great Vaiṣṇava saint of Assam visited the court of Kochbehar from Pātbausi. He was summoned to the court by the king Naranārāyaṇa, and his brother Śukladdhvaja

<sup>1</sup> *Śāke turaga yugmeśe Madhumāsa trayodaśe |*

*Kāmarūpaṁ samāgatya turuskāḥ kṣayamāyayuh ||*

had given him shelter first and later on produced him at the Royal Court. Śukladdhvaja married Kamalāpriyā, the daughter of Ram Rai or Jagatānanda, a third cousin of Śaṅkaradeva.

Śaṅkaradeva by his scholarship and his performance impressed the king so much that the latter issued order for providing all facilities for propagating the Cult of Vaiṣṇasism by Śaṅkaradeva. <sup>2</sup>

It is learnt from the *Caritaputhi* ( biography ) and *aṅkiyā nāṭa* of Śaṅkaradeva that five of his six *aṅkiyā nāṭas* were composed at the behest of Ram Rai ( Jagatānanda ), the chieftain, ( *dalapati* ) of the Bhuyāns, and the drammas were staged under his patronage. The last *aṅkiyā nāṭa*, *Rāmavijaya*, the last literary work of Śaṅkaradeva, was produced and staged under the command of Śukladdhvaja in the year 1568 A. D., the year of departure of Śaṅkaradeva from this world.

It is, therefore, quite clear that Śukladdhvaja came under the influence of Vaiṣṇava faith first through his wife Kamalāpriyā and then directly of Śaṅkaradeva and became a convert to that faith much earlier than the date of re-construction of the temple of Kāmākhyā. Śukladdhvaja, it is well known, was a devout Vaiṣṇava, who wrote a commentary on *Gītāgovinda*.

From the two inscriptions on the west wall inside the Kāmākhyā temple it is learnt that the temple was built (not re-built) by Śukladdhvaja, the younger brother of Malladeva. The inscriptions are silent if Śukladdhvaja had undertaken the construction under or direction of the king Malladeva. The text of the inscription is discussed in the following paragraphs.

It may be presumed that Śukladdhvaja might have undertaken the construction on his own, otherwise the Royal order would have been mentioned ; mention of such direction is an usual practice in the inscriptions. Even if Śukladdhvaja constructed on his own or under direction of the king, there is no convincing reason for giving priority in (re) construction of the Kāmākhyā temple by the two Vaiṣṇava brothers neglecting the Vaiṣṇava temple of Hayagrīva-Mādhava.

<sup>2</sup> "King Naranarayana was so much impressed by his personality and learning that he at once directed that due honour be shown to him ....From that date the king held him in high esteem and treated him with consideration. Śaṅkaradeva established a *Satra* ( Central monastery ) at Kochbehar, made many converts including the *Cota Dewan* ( Śukladdhvaja ) and stayed there for six months on that occasion. Later, as desired by the king he paid a visit to Kochbehar once every year."

Argument may be advanced that King Malladeva and his brother Śukladdhvaja were patrons of all the religious sects irrespective of their personal faith and supported all the sects equally. If this be so, both the temples should have been reconstructed, one by one, if not simultaneously. Moreover, even then the temple of Hayagrīva-Mādhava deserved, as a rule, priority. Because, equality does not mean giving up one's faith.

Does this action suggest that the temple of Hayagrīva-Mādhava at Hajo was not destroyed at all, and only the temple of Kāmākhyā had been damaged or destroyed ?

If the temple of Hayagrīva-Mādhava was not destroyed how could it be re-built in 1583 A.D. by Reghudeva ? Of course, the inscription in the temple speaks of construction and not re-construction. The two inscriptions in the temple of Kāmākhyā also describe that the temple was constructed by Śukladdhvaja and not re-constructed.

Whatever may the inscriptions say, the architectural evidence prove, beyond doubt, that the temple of Kāmākhyā was re-constructed once, if not twice. But can it be said with that certainty about the temple of Hayagrīva-Mādhava ? It is for the archaeologist to examine the structure and give the opinion.

Now let me state briefly the story told in the 12th paṭala of the *Yoginītantra* relating to the destruction of the temple of Kāmākhyā and the disappearance of the Goddess Kāmākhyā from the *Yonīmaṇḍala*.

It is stated that Naraka was made the king of Kāmarūpa by Viṣṇu who advised him to worship Kāmākhyā, which he obeyed. The great sage Vasiṣṭha was once engaged in propitiating the goddess Tārā in Nilācala and one day morning the sage came to *Yonīmaṇḍala* for the performance of the *japa* of Tārā.<sup>3</sup> The Goddess was then worshipped and nobody was allowed to enter inside, when the Goddess was being worshipped. When the sage Vasiṣṭha tried to get inside the temple he was stopped by the king Naraka by saying "during the period of worship of the *Devī* nobody can enter, please wait, you may come in after the worship is over."

The sage became very angry and cursed the Goddess Kāmākhyā to the effect that hence forward neither *japa* nor *pūjā* performed in

<sup>3</sup> *Brahmaṇo mānasah puttro Vasiṣṭho'tiva sadyatiḥ |*  
*Tārāmārādhayāmāsa tadā Nilācale muṇiḥ ||*  
*tatraivaikudine devīm pūjayitūṁ sureśvarīm |*  
*Kāmākhyā maṇḍale tārām puradvāre samāgataḥ*

*Yonīmaṇḍala* would be effective. Since then the darkness covered the *manobhava guhā* (the cave of Cupid) and *Kāmākhyā* disappeared. The Goddess *Kāmākhyā*, in distress, went to *Śiva* and narrated her sad plight in tears. Hearing the episode *Śiva* consoled her. *Śiva* came to the *Yonīpīṭha* and recited *Kālīmantra* and made her free from the effect of the curse. However, the Goddess *Kāmākhyā* had to suffer from the inevitable curse of the *Brahmin* for three hundred years in the age of *Kālī*. Then being asked by *Devī* (the entire tantra is a dialogue between *Śiva* and *Devī*) *Śiva* stated the symptoms, when in the *Kālī* age, the curse of *Vaśiṣṭha* would commence.

The symptoms, as described, are as follows :

When the wicked king of *Pura*<sup>4</sup> is deprived of his kingdom from that time the effect of the curse of *Vaśiṣṭha*, which was kept in abeyance through the intervention of *Śiva*, will then commence. During the period a terrible battle will be fought by the *Saumāras* (Ahoms) *Kuvācas* (Koch) and *Yavanas* (the muslims) in the year Saka 1511 i.e. 1589 A.D. (*kupūrva kulatācandramite śāke*)

“In that battle the *Saumaras* will be defeated by the *Yavanas*, and a *Yavana* king with the initial letter ‘M’ will reign for one year. After a year the *Saumāras* by defeating the *Yavanas* will regain their kingdom. On the other hand, *Kuvācas* having received the assistance from the *Yavanas* will have their kingdom and then both will reign over *Kāmarūpa* for twelve years.

“During this period of anarchy trees will grow on the *Sāla* mountain, boulders will fall on the *Svargadvāra* and on the *gopura* of the *Kāmākhyā* temple, and as a result the temple will be destroyed, and it will go the way of *Urvāsi*. The current of the *Brahmaputra* will be thin.”

“Then again there will be a terrible fight among the three groups (*tribhirmleechaiḥ*) mentioned above. The *Kuvācas* will drive the *Yavanas* beyond the river *Karatoyā*. After this a *brahmin* will reign over *Kāmarūpa* for three years. Then a descendant of the former rulers will be the king of *Kāmarūpa*. His wife will give birth to a son and from the date of the birth of the prince, the curse of *Vaśiṣṭha* will end.”

From a careful reading of the above description it becomes evident that many historical events have been mixed up with the

<sup>4</sup> *kumateḥ purabhūpasya rājyanāśo yadā bhavet |*  
*taddinūt Paramēśāni brahmaśāpaḥ pravarttate ||*



religious practices, and things are garbed, as the inevitable result of a curse.

We come across the *Vaśiṣṭha* episode in the *Kālikāpurāṇa* also.<sup>5</sup> In the *Kālikāpurāṇa*-story the sage *Vaśiṣṭha* cursed *Naraka* to face his death at the hands of *Viṣṇu* in his human form and that he (*Vaśiṣṭha*) would come to worship *Kāmākhyā* after his death, and so long as *Naraka* lives, the Goddess *Kāmākhyā* would also disappear with all her attendants.

In the *Yoginītantra*-story while Goddess *Kāmākhyā* is cursed, *Naraka*, who prevented the sage from seeing *Kāmākhyā* is left untouched. This difference is worth mentioning, since *Naraka* has offended the sage, not *Kāmākhyā*.

The simple meaning of the *Vaśiṣṭha* episode is this that *Vaśiṣṭha* represented a different cult which he wanted to introduce to or imposed on *Kāmākhyā*, and evidently the reigning king symbolised by *Naraka* resisted it. A religious feud followed. Perhaps the followers of *Vaśiṣṭha* (who himself is not an individual) some how managed to make their influence felt and a new trend in the worship has been introduced. The *Yoginītantra* provides a clue to this by saying that the sage *Vaśiṣṭha* was engaged in the meditation of *Tārā* and he went to *Yoginīmaṇḍala* to meditate on *Tārāmantra* there. *Tārā*, *Nilā-Tārā*, *Ugratārā* are the goddesses of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism which were later on identified with the *Tantric* goddesses. The above mentioned episode, in all probabilities, is a reference to this process of identification.

The period of three hundred years of curse is supposed to be the period of confusion and transition. Perhaps during this period the worship of *Kāmākhyā* was stopped or abandoned.

It is to be noted that though the effect of the curse is stated to last for three hundred years, in the subsequent description in the *Yoginītantra* the period is restricted to fifteen years only. This seems to be more logical.<sup>6</sup>

It may be interpreted that in the middle of the sixteenth Century due to a natural calamity, say, an earthquake, the temple of *Kāmākhyā* was destroyed and the *Yonīmaṇḍala* (the cave) was covered by the boulders and heaps of stones and the *pūjā* and *japa* could not be performed. This interpretation is supported by the description that the current of the *Brahmaputra* would become thin and the temple

<sup>5</sup> Chapter 39, *K.P.*—*Shatri*.

<sup>6</sup> “*kumārī kula candrendau gate śāke Maheśvari*”—*Yoginītantra*  
1199 *S'aka* i.e. 1277 A.D. (?)



of Kāmākhyā look like Urvśī.<sup>7</sup> This natural calamity has been linked and mixed up with a religious feud in the garb of a curse.

The period of fifteen years is a period of struggle in the history of Assam for the paramountcy by the contemporary powers. The destruction of the temple of Kāmākhyā, in the absence of a contrary evidence, can safely be taken as due to a natural calamity. Regarding its reconstruction, the two inscriptions have attributed it to Śukladdhvaja. Though the characteristics of the inscriptions leave scope for doubt as to their authenticity, the two are taken as record of facts. The peculiar feature of the two inscriptions is now discussed in brief.

There are two inscriptions inside the temple of Kāmākhyā : one is bigger than the other in size. The bigger one contains two verses which give an account of the construction of the temple. The verses are self-complete and do not warrant any further continuation. But surprisingly the contents of the second verse of the first inscription have been repeated in the second inscription. Taking the two inscriptions as one E. A. Gait translated them as follows :

“Glory to the king Malla Deva, who, by virtue of his mercy, is kind to the people, who in archery is like Arjuna, and in charity like Dadhichi and Karṇa ; he is like an ocean of all goodness, and he is versed in many *śāstras* ; his character is excellent ; in beauty he is as bright as Kandarpa, he is a worshipper of Kāmākhyā. His younger brother Śukla-Deva built this temple of bright stones on the *Nila* hillock, for the worship of Goddess Durgā in 1487 saka (1565 A. D.). His beloved brother Śukladdhvaja again, with universal fame, the crown of the greatest heroes, who, like the fabulous *kalpataru*, gave all that was devoutly asked of him, the chief of all devotees of the goddess, constructed this beautiful temple with heaps of stone on the Nila hill in 1487 saka” (*A history of Assam*,—Edward Gait, 1926)

The original text, shows clearly, though the court *pundit* excels in panegyric scrupulously, that he avoids the genealogy and the name of Viśvasinha, the father of the king Malladeva and his brother Śukladeva.

Now the questions that arise are : why two Royal declarations have been issued to be inscribed on one and the same occasion ? Why the same thing, which has been stated in the first inscription, has again been repeated ? What is the reason for not tracing the genealogy ? Is it not surprising that the name of the father of Malladeva

<sup>7</sup> After the earthquake of 1950 the bed of the Brahmaputra rose and the Paraśurāmakunḍa near Sadiyā was filled in by stones.

and Śukladeva has been omitted ? The court *pundit*, who excels in panegyric, cannot be ignorant of the practice of tracing the genealogy and particularly mentioning the name of the father of the donor.

In contrast to this in the inscription issued by Raghudeva on the occasion of the construction of the temple of Hayagrīva Mādhava- (1583 A. D.) the genealogy has been traced from Vaśva Sinha, and the names of Malladeva and Śukladdhvaja have been mentioned. The inscription and its English translation are given below for comparison.

“There was a ruler on the earth named Viśva Sinha ; his illustrious son, the most wise king Malladeva, was the conqueror of all enemies. In gravity and liberty and for heroism he had a great reputation, and he was purified by religious deeds. After him was born his brother Śukladdhvaja, who subdued many countries, The son of this Śukladdhvaja was, king Raghudeva, who was like the greatest man of the Raghu race : his glory spread out in all directions ; the lord of Kāmarūpa, in obedience to the order of destiny, is the slayer of the wicked, who was like water to the flames of the fire of sorrow of the vast populace.”

Even in the shortest inscriptions issued by or under the command of Ahom rulers the kings are found described as the descendants of Indra etc. (Śakravamsaja) and so on. The inscription of Raghudeva mentioned above stands as a living example to show that age-old practice in issuing inscription has been followed at that period of time also. Viśva Sinha was not an insignificant person to be ignored.

It is, therefore, imperative on the part of the historians to examine the two inscriptions of the temple of Kāmākhyā throwing light on them and dispelling the doubts as to their peculiar nature, duplication etc. On the basis of the result of such a thorough examination the religious faith of Malladeva and more particularly of Śukladdhvaja or *Cota Devan*, who was stated to be converted to the Vaiṣṇava faith, is to be reviewed anew.

There is a big difference between patronising one sect or all sects and describing one as the “worshipper of the feet of Kāmākhyā” (Kāmākhyā-caraṇārcakaḥ), and Malladeva has been described as such. Śukladdhvaja or *Cota Devan*, who is stated to be converted to Vaiṣṇava faith, built the temple and he has been described in the inscription as “one, the foremost of all devotees of *Devī*”. Such an epithet cannot be taken lightly in respect of Śukladdhvaja, a staunch follower of Vaiṣṇavism in words and practice. Unless a person is initiated in the cult or faith he cannot be described as worshipper. The two brothers are known to be not only patrons of learning but were themselves scholars and hence it was quite unlikely that the religious affiliations attributed to them went un-noticed by them.

## SOME PROBLEMS RELATING TO THE COINS OF SIU-KLEN-MONG

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In the year 1894, Golap Chandra Barua,<sup>1</sup> who was commissioned by the Assam Government as the Ahom Translator, while deciphering the Assam legends of a few Ahom coins that belonged to the coin collection of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, came across a silver coin in octagonal shape bearing legends which he read as<sup>2</sup> : obverse: *Chāo phā Su-kleng-mung pin chāo lāk-ni plek-ngi* ; reverse : *Kāo bay phā tā rā heu chu*. His rendering of the legends runs as follows : obverse: *Chāo*=the great; *phā*=king *Su-kleng-mung*; *pin chāo*=reign; *lāk-ni*=year; *plek-ngi*=15th year of the cycle ; meaning : The great king Su-Kleng-Mung Reign 15th year of the cycle ; reverse : *kāo*=I; *phā*=the king; *heu chu*=offer; *bay*=prayer; *tā-rā*=Almighty; meaning: The king offers prayer to the Almighty.

Next year, the above rendering of the coin legends was published in an article form by E.A. Gait, the then Director of Ethnography, Assam in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* under the title 'Notes on Some Ahom coins<sup>3</sup>.

Who was this 'great king 'Shu-kleng-mung'? On the basis of Barua's reading, Gait, in his article, identifies this king as the son of Siu-hum-mong who ruled the Ahom kingdom from A.D. 1539 to 1552<sup>4</sup>.

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\* In this article, I use the spelling 'Siu-klen-mong' which appears to me nearer to the word as pronounced in the Ahom language. The other form 'Suklengmung' whenever appears, refers to that of Golap Chandra Barua and E. A. Gait.

<sup>1</sup> He compiled the *Ahom-Assamese-English Dictionary* and edited and translated into English the *Ahom-Buranji* ; both were published by the Assam Government in 1920 and 1930 respectively.

<sup>2</sup> Recorded by E. A. Gait in his *Report on the Progress of Historical Research in Assam*, 1897, P. 2 ; and his 'Notes on Some Ahom Coins', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 1895, no. 4, pp. 286-89.

<sup>3</sup> 'Notes on Some Ahom Coins', pp. 286-89.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

In the Assamese chronicles he has often been called *Garhgañya Rajā* for having had his capital at Garhāon on the bank of the Dikhow river. Gait also converts the Ahom year 'plek-ngi' or the '15th year of the cycle' as A.D. 1543<sup>5</sup>. In his own words, "the year of the *tao-ci-nga* on the coin of Su-kleng-mung is *plek-ngi*, i.e., the 15th year; the number of the cycle is not mentioned, but as Su-kleng-mung reigned from 1539-1552 A.D. we may assume that it was the 17th *tao-ci-nga*. Consequently, the English date will be  $16 \times 60 + 15 + 568 = 1543$  A.D. or the 4th year of Su-kleng-mung's reign<sup>6</sup>." Since he became king in A.D. 1539, the year *plek-ngi* of the coin or A.D. 1543 is thus the fourth regnal year. This date is therefore taken to be the date of minting of the coin<sup>7</sup>.

This is how Golap Chandra Barua's reading and rendering of the coin-legends in Ahom language of a silver coin in octagonal shape and Gait's interpretation of Barua's reading led to the discovery of Siu-klen-mong's coin in 1894. Following this discovery, several such coins have been reported<sup>8</sup>. Descriptions of such coins are given in the catalogues of Ahom coins<sup>9</sup>. As no other Ahom coin bearing a date earlier to A.D. 1543 has come to light, Siu-klen-mong's coins bearing 'plek-ngi' have so long been upheld as the earliest extant Ahom coins<sup>10</sup>.

Golap Chandra Barua's reading and rendering of the coin legends and Gait's identification of the kings as Siu-klen-mong as well as his conversion of the Ahom year *plek-ngi* as A.D. 1543 have since received almost universal acceptance of scholars without their attention having

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> In the same article, Gait refers to a gold coin with a precisely similar legend. Another gold coin of this king is recorded by Barua in the *Register of Old Ahom Coins* (originally opened at Sibsagar in 1894) as found in the possession of one Bhakat Hazarika of Sibsagar.

<sup>9</sup> For Ahom coins see, Smith, V. A., *Catalogue of the Coins in the Indian Museum* Vol. I, 1906, pp. 298-307; Botham, A. W., *Catalogue of the Provincial Coin Cabinet of Assam*, 1930, pp. 252-523.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, C. J., *Coins of India* 1922, pp. 100-101; Gupta, P. L., *Coins*, 1969, p. 130; Sircar, D. C., *Studies in Indian Coins*, 1968, p. 26; Gogoi, P., *Tai and the Tai Kingdoms*, 1968, p. 102; Basu, N. K., *Assam in the Ahom Age* 1970, pp. 27-28. According to Gait, he was the first Ahom ruler to strike coins, *A History of Assam*, 1926, p. 99.

been drawn to some serious problems arising out of the discovery of the coins. In fact, Siu-klen-mong's coins in octagonal shape bearing legends in Ahom language and character minted in his fourth regnal year do not easily fit into the Ahom coinage theory and thus cause a number of basic problems. This has been shown in this paper.

The problems are : firstly it is a well-established fact that the Ahoms under their leader Prince Siu-ka-pha migrated from Burma early in the thirteenth century of the Christian era and laid the foundation of the Ahom kingdom in the Brahmaputra valley. They gradually extended their sway over the whole of the Brahmaputra valley and ruled over it for about six centuries till 1826, when it came under the occupation of the British following the first Anglo-Burmese war. Their records called *Bu-rañ-jī* which contains information on various aspects of their rule are silent on minting and use of coins in the early period of their rule. Dr. P. D. Choudhury<sup>11</sup> and Dr. Padmeswar Gogoi<sup>12</sup> claim, on the basis of a reference in an Assamese work written by Harakanta Barua in the second half of the nineteenth century<sup>13</sup>, that Siu-dang-pha (A.D. 1398-1407), commonly known as Bāmuni Konwar, and Siu-hum-mong (A.D. 1497-1539) also known as Dihingia Raja minted coins on the occasion of their coronations. But the contemporary chronicles or *bu-rañ-jī* do not contain any such reference to the minting of coins by the above named kings. Moreover, no coin of the two kings has been discovered as yet. In fact, no coin of these rulers or any other Ahom rulers before A.D. 1543 is available to us.

This total absence of Ahoms coins for more than three centuries i. e., from the foundation of the Ahom kingdom by Siu-ka-pha in A. D. 1228 to A. D. 1543, the date of issuing coins by Siu-klen-mong suggests, rather strongly, that the Ahom rulers of this period did not have coins. The minting of coins by Siu-klen-mong in A. D. 1543, therefore, must be considered as a definite landmark in the history of Ahom coinage. Siu-klen-mong's coins, as described and illustrated in different works, prove, rather beyond doubt, that they were fine pieces of silver and gold. The coin described by V. A. Smith in the *Catalogue of Coins in the Indian Museum* is of 177.3 grains in weight and .89 inches in size. But the silver coin described in A. W. Botham's *Catalogue of the Provincial Coin Cabinet* (P. 452) is of 171.8 grains in weight and .87 inches in size. Again, the coin

<sup>11</sup> *Archaeology in Assam*, Gauhati, p. 14-15.

<sup>12</sup> *Tai-Ahom Religion and Customs* Gauhati, 1976, p. 24.

<sup>13</sup> *Assam Buranji*, first published in 1930, pp. 19-20 and 23. Harakanta Barua died in 1900.



described and illustrated in the supplement by Botham and Friel weights 165 grains and .87 inches in size. A comparison of these coins with the Ahom coins minted much later in the eighteenth century does not show any great difference in metal, shape, size and weight. This brings to the point that by A.D. 1543 (in the reign of Siu-klen-mong) the Ahom coins had already attained a standard in form and weight. Their fine quality also indicates a certain degree of excellence in the technique. It is therefore expected that the successors of Siu-klen-mong would naturally continue the practice of minting coins.

But surprisingly, no coin is available of the period from A. D. 1544 to A. D. 1648. i. e., for more than a century. The next coin available to us is dated Śaka 1570 (A. D. 1648) and it bears the title *S'ri S'ri Svarganārāyanadeva*. Although controversy has developed regarding the identity of *Svarganārāyana*, from the date on the coin it is almost certain that he was *Jayadhvajasingha* who became king in that year, and was the first Ahom king to adopt a Hindu title. It is thus seen that the coins of Siu-klen-mong bearing 'plek-ngi' or A. D. 1543, as discovered by Golap Chandra Barua in 1894, are the only coins available between A. D. 1228 and A. D. 1648 covering a period of 420 years.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to enquire into the question of absence of coins from A. D. 1228 to A. D. 1543. But the complete absence of coins for over a century from A. D. 1543 to A. D. 1648, definitely poses a problem that requires serious enquiry. How could there be this gap? Is it because the Ahom kings, who ruled during this period, did not at all mint coins? If so, what made them not mint coins when Siu-klen-mong had already minted fine metallic coins in 1543? If they did, what had happened to their coins?

Secondly, since *Jayadhvajasingha's* reign (1648 to 1663) we get coins of almost all the kings. The coins of *Jayadhvajasingha* and four of his immediate successors bear the first regnal year of their region. *Jayadhvajasingha's* coins bear the date corresponding to A. D. 1648; those of Siu-pong-mong alias *Chakradhvajasingha* (1663-69) bear the date corresponding to A. D. 1663; those of Siu-nyat-pha alias *Udayāditya* (1669-73) A. D. 1669; those of Siu-hung (1675-77) A. D. 1675; and those of Siu-hung-pāt pha alias *Gadādharaśingha* (1681-96) bear the date equivalent to A. D. 1681. The dates on their coins are thus the dates of their first regnal years. Coins of these rulers bearing dates other than their first regnal years have not been



discovered. The chronicles or *buranjis* do not contain any record to suggest that they had ever minted coins bearing dates other than their first regnal years.

It is thus evident that the kings from Jayadhvajasingha to Gadādharaśiṃha issued coins marking their accession to the throne. The successors of Gadādharaśiṃha too followed this tradition but they also issued coins in other years. It being the tradition, i.e., minting of coins in the first year of the reign alone till the reign of Rudraśiṃha, how can there be a coin of Siu-klen-mong, issued in his fourth regnal year? And again, how can the absence of annual coinage before A. D. 1696 (the date of accession of Rudraśiṃha) be reconciled with the minting of coins by Siu-klen-mong in the fourth year of his reign? Is it because, as some suggest, that he was the first to introduce minting of coins in the year 1543? If so, when and how was the practice of minting of coins in the first year of the king's reign, as we notice in the case of all coins, issued before the accession Rudraśiṃha, introduced and who was the ruler?

Thirdly, excepting the coins ascribed to Siu-klen-mong, all other coins with legends in Ahom language bear the date of their accession to the throne. This is clearly evident in the case of coins of Siu-Pong-mong (1663-69), Siu-nyat-pha (1669-73), Siu-hung (1675-77), Siu-pāt-pha (1681-96), Siu-nen-pha (1744-51), Siu-rem-pha (1751-69) which bear legends in Ahom language. This being so, why did Siu-klen-mong mint coins in the fourth year of his reign bearing legends in Ahom language and thus caused a departure from the practice?

Lastly, excepting a few coins in square form issued by Queen Phulesvari in the reign of Sivasimha (1714—44), and by Rajesvarasimha (1751-69), all other coins of the Ahom rulers including those, ascribed to Siu-klen-mong, are of octagonal in shape. This shape is not noticed in other coins in India. In one old Assamese chronicle it is stated that this shape of coin was first adopted in the reign of Siu-seng-pha alias Pratāpasimha (1603-41)<sup>14</sup>. But in another Assamese chronicle, this shape is said to have been introduced in silver coins in the reign of Jayadhvajasingha (1648-63)<sup>15</sup>, who was the first Ahom king to adopt a Hindu title and to become a disciple of a Hindu

<sup>14</sup> The Fourth Chronicle incorporated in the *Satsari Assam Buranji*, edited by S. K. Bhuyan, Gauhati University, 1960, p. 137.

<sup>15</sup> *Assam Buranji*, edited by S. K. Bhuyan, Gauhati, second edition 1960, p. 70.

*Gosāin*. From the statements in the two chronicles, it appears that the octagonal shape was introduced in Ahom coins sometime in the seventeenth century. Under these circumstances, the discovery of coins of Siu-klen-mong in octagonal shape on the basis of the reading of the legends by Golap Chandra Barua some eighty-five years ago, therefore, needs serious reconsideration.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> In a short article entitled 'Re-reading of the Coins of Su-klen-mong' in the *Professor Birinchi Kumar Barua Commemoration Volume*, Gauhati, 1966, pp. 225-29, the writer identified the coins as belonging to Siu-pong-mong alias Chakradhvajasimha. Later on, N. G. Rhodes in the article, 'the Earliest Coins of Assam' in the *Numismatic Circular*, October, 1973, p. 375 too attributed the coins to Supung-mung (alias Chakradhvajasimha) thus removing all problems paused by the coins of Siu-klen-mong.

The problem may be reviewed again on the basis of the Ahom system of chronology besides challenging the coin legends of the rulers concerned or putting new light there on—Editor.

## NEW LIGHT ON THE NIDHANPUR COPPER-PLATE GRANT OF BHĀSKARAVARMAN

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As a source of the history of ancient Assam the value of the Nidhanpur Copper-Plate grant of Bhāskaravarman can never be overestimated. Out of the seven plates which the grant is consisted of, one is missing. Nidhanpur in modern Sylhet is the little village where this remarkable discovery had been made in 1912. A ring along with a cracked royal seal holds the plates together and the seal bears the stamp of the front view of an elephant. The renewal of a perpetual revenue free land granted by king Bhāskaravarman in the early part of the 7th century A.D. of the original grant of land made by his great-great-grand father Mahābhūta Varman who flourished in the first half of the 6th century A. D. has been described in the document. The gift of land to a large number of the Brāhmana folk was the object of the grant. Apart from these the charter gives us a vivid picture of the political, economic and religious conditions of ancient Assam during the 6th and the 7th centuries A. D.

The renowned king of Kāmarūpa, Bhāskaravarman, as revealed by the document, hailed from one of the most ancient royal families of India ; was a renowned champion of Brāhmanism ; worked for an effective organisation of the duties of various castes and stages of life ; and revealed the light of Āryyadharma by clearing away the accumulated darkness of this Kali Age. Bhāskaravarman, the renowned personality of Indian history, had during his lifetime, earned the friendship of an equally known figure, Emperor Harshavardhana. Again it was during the former's reign in the first half of the 7th century A. D. that Hiuen Tsāng, the famous traveller from China had travelled in Kāmarūpa. Out of the many copper-plates of Kāmarūpa kings which have been discovered uptil now, the Nidhanpur set of copper-plates of Bhāskaravarman is of special importance because : Firstly, it is one of the important early discovered plates. Secondly, the copper-plate charters had been issued by king Bhāskara who is

definitely the most renowned amongst the sovereigns of Kāmarūpa. Thirdly, it was from the *skandhāvāra* (camp) of Karṇasuvarṇa and not from his capital that Bhāskaravarman had issued the renewal of the land grant. Bhāskaravarman had issued his Nidhanpur charter from the historic city of Karṇasuvarṇa because this place was the capital of the then kingdom Gauḍa which was conquered by king Bhāskara during the early part of his glorious reign.

The body of the document explains the circumstances under which the renewal of the grant was issued. The original copper-plates were demolished by fire at the time when they were in the custody of the successors-in-interest, probably the descendants of the original donees. About a century after the original grant (of Mahābhūtavarman), during the reign of Bhāskaravarman, officers of the state, i. e., of the Revenue Department made an attempt to assess land-revenue on the revenue free donated land in the absence of any valid document. The land grant was then being enjoyed by the descendants of the original donees and it was at their instance that Bhāskaravarman having informed the *jyeṣṭhabhadrās* (elder noblemen or senior officials), addressing the present and future *Viṣayapatis* (District Officers) and *Adhikaraṇas* (Courts of Justice) of Chandrapurivīṣaya (Chandrapuri District) ordered for a fresh copper-plate charter or renewal of the revenue-free grant, in perpetuity and according to the *nyāya* (principle) of *bhumichidra* in the name of the then beneficiaries, i. e., the descendants of the original donees. Vasuvarna was the writer and composer of the text of the document and it was engraved on the plates by the engraver (*Sekhyakara*) Kāliyā.

The revenue free land was donated in Mayūra Sālmalāgrahārakṣhetra under Chandrapurivishaya (Chandrapuri District). From the document we come to know of a number of names of important officers such as the Chandrapurināyaka (the leader or chief of Chandrapuri) ; Srikṣhi Kunda was the *simūpradātā*, (demarcator of boundaries of the land) ; *Nyāyakaṇika* (Judge or probably the officer settling boundary disputes) Janārdana Svāmi ; *Vyavahārī* (lawyer). Hara Datta ; *Kāyasthas* (clerks) Dunhunātha and others : *Bhāṇḍāgārādhikṛita* (superintendent of store or Royal Treasury) Mahāsāmanta Divākaraprabha ; *Utkhetayita* (collector of cash revenue) Dattākara Pūrna.

As the characters of the letters engraved were not exactly the same as those of the original plates destroyed by fire, specific instructions were given in the bottom of the charter that no one should question the genuineness of this document (i. e., the renewal)

Mahābhūtarman had, during his life-time, donated that part of the land which lay to the west of the Kauśikā and to the east of Ganginikā.<sup>1</sup> The river Kauśikā or Kosi now-a-days flows westward of the Bhāgalpur district, Bihār. Thus from this reference of the early geographical conditions of eastern India we get a clear idea of the contemporary demographic conditions of those days.

According to the grant Samudra Varman, the second ruler of the Varman dynasty, was the fifth Samudra (ocean) but with a slight difference. In the ocean there exists occasional disturbances because the larger fishes often swallow the smaller ones and thus create havoc. But so far as Samudravarman was concerned, he was free from such troubles as *matsyānyāya* (lowlessness). From the word *matsyānyāya* we get an idea that the country had witnessed chaos, anarchy and lowlessness prior to the reign of Samudravarman. The hint that during his reign there prevailed peace and prosperity confirms the sound political and economic condition of the land. The grant states that Mahendravarman, the sixth ruler, was the repository of all sacrifices. A detailed study of such sacrifices like the *Aśvamedha* will give us an idea about the contemporary socio-cultural condition of Assam at that remote period.

According to the eulogy of the Nidhanpur grant Bhaskaravarman has been described as king created by God for reestablishing the institutions of society which had become mixed-up since a long time (L. 35). He propagated the light of the *Āryyadharma* by scattering away the darkness of the Kali Age, by means of a proper expenditure of his revenue (L. 36). Under his influence the loyalty of his subjects increased, and he displayed modesty and cultivated close acquaintance with them (LL. 37-39). He was generous while giving away gifts and for his ever ready nature of helping the poor and needy by self-sacrifice he could be compared to king Sivi. Further he has been described as skilful as Brihaspati in the matter of timely application of the six political expedients. Not even a single sign of the usual vices of the kings could be found in him and he spent the whole of his life in performing good and virtuous deeds. He was the very life of *dharma*, the abode of justice, the home of virtues, the treasury of supplicants, the shelter of the fearful and the temple of plenty (LL. 40-44). The expressions bearing on proper expenditure of his revenue, offering

<sup>1</sup> Location of the Nidhanpur grant of Bhaskaravarman of Kamarupa (P. N. Bhattacharya, *JASB*, Vol. IV, No. 3. pp. 58-66)



of bounteous gifts, application of six political expedients, treasury of supplicants and the temple of plenty, as are attributed to him, have political, economic and cultural significance.

A diplomat as he was, Bhāskaravarman received due recognition from others due to his skill in the act of timely effecting a co-ordination of the precepts relating to the *guṇas* i.e. six elements of foreign policy as are known in the Sanskrit literature.<sup>2</sup>

The grant also gives a detailed account of land tenure system, the labour organisation and the revenue administration of ancient Assam.

### Land Tenure System :

In the lines 50-55 of the Nidhanpur Copper-Plate inscription of Bhāskaravarman the terms and condition of the land grant have been mentioned : "Let it be known to you (all) that the land of the mayūrasālmalāgrahāra granted by issuing a copper-plate charter by king Bhūtiavarman has become liable to revenue on account of the loss of copper-plate.....having issued orders for making a copper-plate grant the land has been awarded to the Brāhmanas who had been enjoying the grant already in the manner of *bhūmichidra* so that no tax is levied on it."<sup>3</sup> From this reference it is clear that there existed many regulations relating to the land tenure system especially *bhūmichidra*, which according to Pandit Padmanāth Bhattāchārya is uncultivated land or land useless for cultivation and where there remained no chance for the corns to grow.<sup>4</sup>

### Survey of Land :

The Nidhanpur copper-plate has demarcated boundaries of every plot of land on eight sides. Towards the east the very dried Kauśikā marked by a ( piece of ) hewn fig tree, to the south-west the dried river-bed (Ganginikā) marked by a cutdown fig tree ; to the west the boundary at present is the dried river-bed (Ganginikā) ; to the northwest a potters' pit and the (said) dried river bed towards the east, to the north a larga jatali tree ; to the north-east the pond of the vyavahāri (lawyer) Khāsoka and the dried river Kauśikā.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Dr. M. M. Sarma : *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, pp. 53 and 74

<sup>3</sup> Dr. B. K. Barua : *Cultural History of Assam*, p. 85

<sup>4</sup> *Kāmarūpa S'āsanāvartī*, p. 33

<sup>5</sup> Nidhanpur Copper-plate Seventh Plate, lines 4-7



The organised system of keeping record of land and periodical survey and the inspection of the same had been elaborately testified and referred to in this chapter. The land grant bears all the important details of a revenue document. These are :

(1) Name of the composer ; (2) Name of the writer ; (3) Name of the engraver ; (4) Supplier of boundaries and the exact boundaries ! (5) Judge to settle boundary disputes ; (6) Lowyer ; (7) Kāyastha (clerk) ; (8) Superintendent of store and treasury ; (9) Collector of Revenue ; (10) Donor's full name and titles ; (11) Name of the donee ; (12) Place where drawn up ; (13) Witness of the grant ; (14) Purpose of the grant ; (15) The duration of the grant ; (16) The inheritance there of ; (17) The inalienability there of ; (18) Any guaranteed immunity from taxation ; (19) Testification to future rulers ; and (20) Corroboration from law-books.

From the above discussion we can arrive at safe conclusion that the lands so far endowed, had to be measured in presence of the State officials and the minute details had to be furnished in case the land was transferred. These details include inter-alia, the boundaries of the land, the economic and social use and the value of the land. The determination of the value of a plot of land was made in accordance with its productive capacity.

#### Types of land :

One Peculiar feature of the land system so far testified by available sources was that, all the significant portions of land that were distributed by the king to his subjects were not arable. Now a proper distinction can be made in regard to the type of land on the basis of the findings of the Nidhanpur grant which clearly proves that the grants were related in the main, to two types of land, cultivated and uncultivated<sup>6</sup>.

#### Ownership of land :

The ownership of the soil was vested in the hands of the king, who was also deemed to be the supreme master in the management of the land. For example, he could alienate land at his sweet will and could also resume it if he so desired. Since he (the king) was the authority over land, the redemption is expressly forbidden with grave consequences and this was also stated in the Nidhanpur Copper-plate Inscription.

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<sup>6</sup>. KS p. 107

The surplus cultivable land which accrued as a result of the with-drawal of the river Kauśikā or Kosikā was distributed according to the shares enumerated in the document. But this was not so in case of the land enlarged by the river Ganginikā (dried river bed) where the entire land was distributed per capita amongst the Brāhmanas who were also the descendants of the original donees.<sup>7</sup>

#### Labour Organisations : Professional class system :

One strange but significant aspect of the social system of ancient India was the institution of *Varṇāśramadharmā*, the division of society on the basis of caste, the impact of which was highly felt in Assam too. The Nidhanpur grant maintains that king Bhāskaravarman was created solely for the purpose of re-establishing the institutions of class and order which had for long been lying in a confused state due to the prevailing state of *mātsyanyāya*.<sup>8</sup>

The division of the labour helps in the promotion of productivity in all spheres of economy and that is why this institution was considered highly important in ancient India. The grants of ancient Assam followed properly the rules of the division of labour which was prescribed by the *Arthaśāstrakāras* for augmenting production and thereby securing a happy and a prosperous life. Thus the society which was set up on the basis of the classes and orders had an important bearing on the socio-economic life of the people at large. The system of *varṇāśrama* resulted in the rise of a number of labour classes closely associated with the socio-economic and even the cultural life of ancient Assam.

The responsibility of the Brāhmanas in ancient Assam was not only confined to his religious performance, but also that he had an added economic responsibility towards society. This has been disclosed in a passage in Copper-plates of Nidhanpur where in we find reference to Agrahāra (donation of revenue free land to the Brāhmanas) and the reservation of shares (*angā*) for a Bali-Charu-Satra. The instances of land grants for Bali-Charu-Satra of a particular temple deity had been found in other copper-plates. The grants were made for the Brahmanas specially for the use of Bali-Charu-Satra and for the priests, cook, Mahanta and the learned scholars whose services were highly required for

<sup>7</sup> Sri K. K. Gupta Copper plates of Sylhat, p. 54

<sup>8</sup> Dr. P. C. Choudhury : *History of Civilisation of the people of Assam*, p. 185.

various purposes in connection with socio-religious and charitable institutions.<sup>9</sup>

### Revenue Administration : Land Revenue :

Land has always been considered as the principal source of revenue and as such the fixation of land revenue was based primarily on the basis of the productivity of the soil. In Kāmarūpa the principle of *bhūmichidra* was followed by the crown at the time of granting land (revenue free) in perpetuity. Here the term *bhūmichidra* denotes "the principle of the rent free enjoyment of land by one who brings it under cultivation for the first time." "In other words the land which was brought under cultivation for the first time remained free from any tax or land revenue."<sup>10</sup>

The lands were properly assessed and revenues collected by a class of official. The Nidhanpur Copper-Plate refers to the term Dattakāra Pūrṇa who was assigned for the collection of an extra tax like *uparikara* or *utkhetana*. *Uparikara*, Hoernle remarks, 'is a fiscal term'; the rent or tax (*kara*) paid by and *upari* or tenant who does not reside or has no occupancy rights in the land.<sup>11</sup>

In the same grant we also find mention of another Officer colled Simāpradātā whose duty was to mark the boundaries of the land holdings. In Assam Plates of Vallabhadeva we also come across a similar term known as "Bhūmyākarsakaśāsani". Dr. M. M. Śarmā interprets that the clear demarcation of the boundary is given as a deterrent (Śāsani) for the encroacher (ākarsaka). Thus it seems that adequate precautions might have been taken to prevent any encroachment on land.<sup>12</sup>

The above survey reveals that the Kamarupa kings ardently realised that the material well-being was indispensable for the all round progress of the country. The judicious distribution of revenue and proper management of the state's affairs had considerably augmented the economic prosperity of ancient Assam. Moreover, the grant of Agrahara to a large number of Brahmanas and the creation and maintenance of numerous temples also prove the kings' patronage of religion and learning. This throws new light as well on the socio-cultural life of the people of ancient Assam.

<sup>9</sup> IAA p. 75

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75

<sup>11</sup> KS, p. 86. While *bhūmichidra* is the principle underlying the types of land, i.e., arability or otherwise, *uparikara* and *utkhetana* are extra imposts. (Ed.)

<sup>12</sup> IAA, p. 301

## **ANANDA RAM DHEKIAL PHOOKAN AS AN ADMINISTRATOR IN THE EARLY BRITISH PERIOD IN ASSAM**

**Prof. Nanda Talukdar**

**Gauhati**

Till the third decade of British Rule in Assam commencing from 1826 the top echelon of the District administration, comprising the Principal Assistant ( present-day Deputy Commissioner ), the Junior Assistant ( present-day Additional Deputy Commissioner or Sub-divisional Officer ) and the Sub-Assistant ( present-day Assistant Commissioner or Extra Assistant Commissioner ), was denied to the Indians, although a few Assamese gentlemen were to be found down the hierarchy as Assistant Magistrates, Munsifs and Sadar Amins. This may be generally attributed to the lack of English education among the Assamese. The first Indian and first Assamese to hold the pride of place was Ananda Ram Dhekial Phookan.

Born in 1829, the fourth year of British rule in Assam, Ananda Ram received his early education in the Gowahatty Seminary, the first centre of English education in Assam established in 1835, and was later educated in the Hindu College of Calcutta. His father Haliram Dhekial Phookan died in 1832 while in service as an Assistant Magistrate.

Back from Calcutta, Ananda Ram started his career in 1847 as Zimmdar in the Khata Pargana, which was followed by a short tenure as Acting Munsif in Nalbari, whereafter he was appointed the Dewan to Raja Amrit Narayan Bhup of Bijni in 1849.

Bijni was an ancient native State comprising a substantial part of the present-day district of Goalpara, from Khutaghat Pargana on the north to Howraghat Pargana on the south of the Brahmaputra. The Raja was a descendant of Chilarai, the great General and younger brother of the Koch King Naranarayan.

The young Dewan took immediate cognizance of a host of irregularities and inconsistencies prevalent in the administration of the State, and went on to draft a comprehensive set of Regulations, wherein he exhaustively and meticulously codified the specific duties and responsibilities of various functionaries like Nayab, Gomasta, Mahari, Taski Nabis, Jama Nabis, Sumar Nabis, Tahsildar etc., and prescribed specific

rules applicable to various branches of the administration like law and order, revenue settlement, and Judiciary. The result was a masterpiece that came to be known as *Phookan Dewan Kayda Bandi*.

Having proved his mettle in administration at the young age of twenty-one, Ananda Ram was set to enter into what had hitherto been the exclusive domain of the Britishers. In 1850 he was appointed Sub-Assistant temporarily and posted at Nowgong and then at Goalpara. In 1852 came his permanent appointment as Sub-Assistant at Barpeta. (The monthly emolument of a Sub-Assistant at that time was Rs. 250).

But his pen did not rest. In 1850 he brought out a Bengali translation "*Sadar Dewani Nispatti*" of a Civil Law compilation in English, for the benefit of the common men who did not understand English.

In 1853, when Dhekial Phookan was posted as Sub-Assistant at Barpeta, Mr. A. J. Moffat Mills, Judge of the Calcutta Sadar Dewani Adalat, visited Assam on an assignment to study and report on various aspects of the province of Assam. Dhekial Phookan took pains to prepare a comprehensive Memorandum, and came down to Gauhati on leave to submit it to Mr. Mills on 4th July, 1853 and also took the opportunity to submit his view points verbally before Mr. Mills, who was impressed enough to append to his *Reports on the Province of Assam* the Memorandum under the caption *Observation on the Administration of the Province of Assam by Baboo Ananda Ram Dekial Phookan* (Appendix J).

The 30 page Memorandum was a testimony of the independent thoughts, deep concerns, keen observations and intimate experiences of a young administrator visualising a bright future for the land and its people. It dealt in detail with a wide range of subjects, namely : The Revenue system, Rates of Assessment, Agriculture, Manufactures, Education and Schools, Public works, Religious and Charitable Endowments, Opium cultivation, The Judicial System, The Police and Mofussil Courts, The Rural Police, Law of procedure, Law of Evidence, Oaths, Execution of Decrees, Redress in the Criminal Courts, Administration of Hindoo law and Legal opinions, Judges and Vakeels, Language of the Courts, Registry of Deeds, Registration of Marriages.

In his Memorandum, while recognising the peace and order prevailing in the Province under the British following the Burmese invasion, Dhekial Phookan ardently advocated : Modernisation of the Agricultural system, Flood control through embankment of rivers, Industrialisation and Growth of Technical Institutions, improvement of Transport and Communication and Facilities for Medical Education and



Health Services to fight the havocking epidemics. Citing China, he brought into focus the harm caused by opium to the people. He also pleaded for governmental patronage to the places of public worship as had been extended under the Ahoms.

A Government servant as he was, he was exceptionally forthright in criticising in his Memorandum the various administrative lapses and inadequacies, particularly the corruption and high-handedness rampant in the Police Department, the qualitative deficiencies of the Officers presiding over Courts and the scanty knowledge of the Legal Practitioners.

Under 'Education and Schools', he bemoaned the state of education, especially Sanskrit education, under the British, and remarked : "We are constrained with regret to acknowledge that education in the country under the enlightened Government of England is in a retrograde state. During the prosperity of the Native Government the education of the respectable classes in Sanskrit knowledge always formed an object of the social care and attention of the state. In every important village there exists public schools to train up the youth in the knowledge of Sanskrit literature and science ; and so much was then the general thirst for Sanskrit knowledge that numerous youths travelled to Nadia to receive instructions in the abstruse sciences."

Pleading among other things for the vernacular medium of instruction in the schools, he suggested : "In our humble opinion" the following arrangement appears to be best calculated to promote the cause of education—viz the substitution, in the schools, of the Vernacular language in lieu of the Bengalee, the publication of a series of popular work on the different branches of Native and European Knowledge in the Assamese language, the establishment of a Normal School to train up a body of teachers and creation of a separate department for the study of Sanskrit in the Vernacular Schools."

Under "Language of the Courts", he demanded : "For more than ten years after the annexation of the Province the Assamese was the language of the courts. On what grounds the Bengalee has been new allowed to supersede the Vernacular we are at a loss to understand. The Assamese being the Vernacular language as well of the people as of the majority of the judges and ministerial officers of the courts, no inconvenience can possibly arise from its use, and if it be advanced that the Bengalee bears an affinity with the Assamese, we would beg to point out that the Bengalee bears no closer resemblance to the Assamese than it does to the Uria language,

and if the courts of Orissa be allowed the privilege of using the language of the country, we are unable to understand why the same benefit should have been withheld to the Assamese"

From Barpeta, Dhekial Phookan came to Nowgong for the second time as Sub-Assistant, but was soon promoted as Junior Assistant in 1854. He also officiated several times as the Principal Assistant of the District. He continued at Nowgong till his precious life was cut short on June 16, 1859 at the age of 29 years 9 months 29 days.

During the food crisis in Nowgong, Dhekial Phookan came down heavily upon a well off section of the population taking to speculative hoarding of paddy. This came to be known as Operation 'Bharal Bhanga' (Breaking into Granaries).

In 1855, Dhekial Phookan added yet another feather to his cap by bringing out what was probably the first Law book in Bengali, entitled *Notes on the Laws of Bengal* (Vol. I)—*Ain O Byabastha Sangraha*. The 330 page volume, written in plain and perspicuous Bengali, dealt with a host of subjects, e. g., Custom and Social laws, Human Rights, English Parliament, Rights of the Ruler and the Ruled, Supreme Government of India, etc.

In the same year he brought out another book entitled, *A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language and Vernacular Education in Assam*, under the pen-name of "A Native". In this small book, he recounted the history and presented a comparative analysis of the Assamese language with Bengali and Hindi, to assert its unique features and independent entity.

*Asamiya larar Mitra—The Friend of Young Assam*" (1849) was another publication to his credit, under the pen-name of "An Assamese." Among his unpublished works were two dictionaries—one English to Assamese and the other Assamese-to English.

It must be said to the credit of Dhekial Phookan, the zealous votary of the Assamese language, that he never entertained enmity towards other languages, which is only testified to by his publications in Bengali. Besides, he was the pioneer to receive and promote English education in Assam and to adopt the western mode of living. At Nowgong, he opened a school in his own residence to foster imparting of English education to a number of students.

Quite remarkably, the able and distinguished administrator in Ananda Ram Dhekial Phookan lived in perfect harmony with the litterateur that he was. One accomplished the other; but the two were never at loggerheads.

## SNAKE WORSHIP : GODDESS MANASĀ CULT IN ASSAM

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### THE SNAKE WORSHIP :

The serpent was held in universal veneration in early days, and serpent worship was popular in many places of the world in those days when the people used to live in the forest and in the caves. In those days they had various experiences of fighting with different ferocious animals and creatures, and so men used to show some special reverence to the dangerous or useful animals. Moreover in early society concepts of deities centered round either natural phenomenon or animals and creatures,<sup>1</sup> and these animals may be grouped into two categories : (i) strong and ferocious, and (ii) useful and mild animals. The snakes naturally fall under the first category and they have also played an important role in the religious history of mankind, particularly in India. There are good number of theories regarding the origin of the snake worship in India.<sup>2</sup> The fear coupled with wonder brought about the worship of the snake all over the world as a species by creating a serpent God or Goddess.<sup>3</sup>

The practice of snake worship in India was popular among the people of Harappa culture, and references to the cult of snakes are also available in ancient Indian literature such as the Vedas, the Puranas, the Epics, the Buddhist Jatakas and other religious books.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the snake is considered as the symbol of Power, and it is also very closely associated with Lord Siva, who used snake as an important ornament. In the *Mahabharata*,

<sup>1</sup> Crooke, W : 1907 : *Natives of Northern India*.

<sup>2</sup> Rapson, E. J (ed) : *The Cambridge History of India*, Vol. I ; and the *Proceedings of All India Oriental Conference*, 1935.

<sup>3</sup> Lubbock, J ( Rev. ed.) : *Origin of the Civilization and the Primitive Conditions of the Men*.

<sup>4</sup> Vogal, J : 1926 : *Indian Serpent Lore*.

Lord Siva is described as having a girdle of snakes, earrings of snakes, a sacred-thread i.e. Upavita of a snake and a outer garment of snake's skin. The serpent king Vāsuki is believed to be slung round the neck of Lord Siva.<sup>5</sup> Siva is also worshipped as snake God in many places of India, and he is known as Lingaraja because Siva is represented by a linga. In South India the Lingayats worship the image of snake made of earth on the *Nāgapanchami* day of *Śrāvaṇa*.

### THE SNAKE GODDESS MANASĀ :

Manasā is believed to be a daughter of Siva. The reason behind such faith is probably the close association of snakes with Lord Siva, whose cult may have had its origin among people who revered snakes. Moreover, the same races worshipped both Siva and snakes in early days, and thus, the Saivas have accepted the snake-worship as a part of their cult. The snake is also related to Vishnu. The pious Śeṣa Nāga was a manifestation of Vishnu. The Epic and Puranic accounts of Kṛṣṇa's victory over *Kālīya* Nāga is very significant. The Bhagavatas adopted the popular worship of the Nāgas by declaring the Naga image to mean Baladeva, and Balarama is further said to be an incarnation of Śeṣa Nāga. The Nagas played a very prominent role in Buddhist religion. The popular Buddhism is also related to the snake cult. Relating to the Buddha and the Nāgas many legends are available in Buddhist writings.<sup>6</sup> The Mahayana Buddhists considered Janguli as snake goddess. The early Jainism was also closely associated with the snake cult ; the snake images that are available in most of the Jaina temples explain such association.<sup>7</sup> Jainism has also assimilated the snake-worship into its own faith like Hinduism and Buddhism.<sup>8</sup> Thus the snake-worship and snake spirit entered into the Indian mythology and played a very important role in the cultural life of India. This cult originally was an outcome of fear, but later on grew up independently in early India ; ultimately, this cult has been accepted by the Hindus, the Buddhists and the Jinas.

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<sup>5</sup> Vogel, J : *Ibid*.

<sup>6</sup> Vogel, J : *Ibid*.

<sup>7</sup> *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. VII.

<sup>8</sup> Jain, J. C : 1947 : *Life in Ancient India as depicted in the Jaina Canons*.

The images of Manasā, which were found in different places of India are of mainly two types : (i) Images having two arms and (ii) Those having four arms. Such images are found preserved in different museum. These are in different sitting poses either on lotus throne, or under a canopy of snake-hood. In the images goddess Manasā is seated either in *sukhāsana* pose, or in *lalitāsana* or in *padmāsana* pose.<sup>9</sup> The most of such images of the snake—goddess Manasā dating from the 9th century to the 13th century A.D. have been discovered throughout Eastern India.<sup>10</sup> Different group of scholars observe some identical features among the goddesses Sarasvatī, Jangulī and Manasā. But the *Manasā Kāvya* and other such literature give us sufficient evidence to believe that Manasā is an independent deity, and originally Manasā was worshipped by the lower classes in Eastern India as symbolised by a twig, or an earthen pot, or both and later on, the upper classes also worshipped with the same symbol along with the Puranic gods.

It is very interesting that one of the important characteristics of the Indian religions is the process of assimilation of the deities of different religious systems. This process of assimilation indicates the friendly relationship between Hinduism and Buddhism ; even the Muslims are also influenced to a great extent by such process of assimilation. Such assimilation of deities, of particularly Manasā is believed to have taken place due to their common origin in both Hinduism and Buddhism. The different legends regarding Manasā, however, clearly suggest that the goddess is of a much complex nature.

#### MANASĀ IN ASSAM :

The worship of the snake goddess Manasā is very popular in Assam, particularly in the present districts of Kamrup, Goalpara and Darrang.<sup>11</sup> The early Assamese literature has a class of songs which tell us the pathetic story of Beula and Lakhindara and the power of Manasā.<sup>12</sup> Mankara, Durgāvara and Sukavi Nārāyaṇdeva were three early poets,<sup>13</sup> who composed these poems on the worship of the Sakta goddess Manasā.<sup>14</sup> The date of Mankara is supposed to be the latter part

<sup>9</sup> Baruah, B. K. ; 1951 : *A Cultural History of Assam*, Vol. I.

<sup>10</sup> Maity, P.K. : 1966 : *Historical Studies in the Cult of the Goddess Manasā*.

<sup>11</sup> Barua, B. K. & Sarma, S. N. : (ed.) : 1964 : *Manasā Kāvya*, Introduction.

<sup>12</sup> Das, B. C. : 1965 : *Asamiya Sahityar-Buranji* (Manasā Sakha).

<sup>13</sup> Goswami, S. N. : 1967 : *Asamiya Sahityar Katha*.

<sup>14</sup> Barua, B. K. : *Studies in Early Assamese Literature*.



of the 15th century while Durgāvara's date is determined in the early part of the 16th century.<sup>15</sup> There is a popular belief that this Manasā cult spread into Assam from Bengal after the Muslim invasion of Kamrup in the 13th century; but we have neither historical record nor authentic evidence in support of this hypothesis. Moreover, nobody can deny the fact that there was political and cultural contacts between Bengal and Assam before the Muslim invasion. So Muslim invasion can not be considered as the only cause of the spread of Manasā worship in Assam. The worship of Mārai or Māre, which is related to Manasā, is very popular among the Bōḍos.

There is another popular belief in Mangoldoi area of Darrang district, where the people have a strong faith that the Mariya, a small caste dealing in brass, bell-metal, iron, etc. were originators of Manasā cult in these localities. The same belief is popular in Kamrup district also. The Manasā literature has also supported this belief and tradition.<sup>16</sup>

U. Thlen worship of the Khasis<sup>17</sup> has also been identified with snake-God. Snake worship is very popular from early days among many tribal people of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, etc.<sup>18</sup> So the worship of Manasā in Assam may be due to the close contact and association with tribal people.

Mankara has specifically mentioned about the methods of Manasā worship. Visahari, i.e., Manasā is worshipped in the form of an earthen pot (*kalasi*) along with a twig of a indigenous variety of *Siju* (Euphorbia) by offering lotuses, and still Manasā is worshipped during the four months of rainy season. According to Durgāvara's songs Manasā worship occurred on the day of *Śuklā-pañchamī tithi* in the month of *Śrāvaṇa*. In Bengal Manasā is worshipped in the form of a pyramid prepared of banana-bark, which system prevailed in certain places of Goalpara district. (The place of worship is known as *Maṇḍapa*, which is selected as a temporary spot for this purpose only and a twig of *Siju* is also planted thereon. Manasā is also known as 'Mārai', or 'Māre' in Assam. This Marai or Māre may be explained philologically as a derivative of *maṇḍapa*.)

Manasā is not an ordinary goddess of snake. She is considered as one of the very powerful goddesses. Mankara has narrated all about her divine powers. The childless get the blessings, the

<sup>15</sup> Sarma, S. N. : 1971 : *Asamiya Sahityar Itivritta*

<sup>16</sup> Barua & Sarma : 1964 : *Manasā Kāvya*.

<sup>17</sup> Kakati B. : 1955 : *Purani Kamarupar Dharman Dhara*.

<sup>18</sup> Neog, M : *Purani Asamar Samaj Aru Sanskriti*.

bachelors get good wives, the poor become wealthy and prosperous by worshipping Manasā. Manasā is also considered as the principal deity of epidemic diseases<sup>19</sup>. So during the outbreak of any epidemic the local people organise this Mārai Pūjā. The tribal people particularly Baḍo and Hājong communities do not allow their children to see image of Manasā. The goddess is appeased by offering many things including pigeons, ducks, goats and buffaloes etc.<sup>20</sup>

The *Deodhāni* dance and the *Ojhāpālī* are two noteworthy features of Manasā worship in Assam. It is said that the *Deodhāni* dance originated from Mangaldoi and North Lakhimpur ; it is called *Deodhāni* when it is performed by a lady ; otherwise it is known as *Deodhā* dance. The participants, who generally belong to the lower classes, are believed to be the choice of the goddess. Manasā songs are recited at the time of their dance. Few of them are inspired by the goddess to foretell the future. Similar beliefs are also current in certain parts of South India and in Bengal.

The *Deodhāni* dance is a popular dance in Lower Assam. The art of this dance has kept alive the ancient traditions and conventions, where the various poses and postures are incorporated from the *Nāṭyaśāstra*,<sup>21</sup> but in course of time, the standard of the dance has much deteriorated as the traditional art is almost lost.

The *Ojhāpālī* is also an indigeneous choric dance. It was current in the land even before the Vaisnavite renaissance in the 15th century. The *Ojhāpālī* is a very interesting dance, where the *Ojhā* or the leader of the entire group of dancers recites the verses, i.e. lyrics to the accompaniment of gestures and the *Pālis* i.e. the chorus-singers comprising four or five members repeat each line after the *Ojhā* playing with cymbals while the *Dāināpālī*, who is considered as the right hand of the *Ojhā* carries on a dialogue with the leader or *Ojhā* of the folk-idiom. The *Dāināpālī*'s main business is to explain those songs in a simple language in a witty manner and homely parables. Actually such dialogues make the whole function very interesting. The *Ojhāpālī* is religious in character and it had the myths associated with *Manasā*, the snake-goddess. The violent dance of Lord Srikrishna on the expanded hood of Kālī Nāga may be compared to the cosmic dance of Lord Siva. Thus dancing entered into *Ojāpālī* because of the dances of

<sup>19</sup> Barua & Sarma : *Ibid*,

<sup>20</sup> Barua & Sarma. *Ibid*.

<sup>21</sup> Bharata Natya Sastra, VIII, 16-35.

Krishna and Siva<sup>22</sup>. The songs of Manasā are sung at the Ojhapālī if Manasā is worshipped as *Mārai*.<sup>23</sup> The Deodhāni dance is actually performed at the time of *Mārai* worship, but in course of time it has also been performed at the time of Manasā worship.

The Manasā worship in Kamakhya is performed on the last day of *Śrāvāṇa* in the form of the earthen pot, a (*Kalasī*) and it continues upto the second day of Bhādra. Many images of snakes are placed around the altar. The Deodhā or Deodhāni dance along with the recitation of the songs of Manasā in Kamakhya is an essential feature of the worship of Manasā. The Participants in the dance follow certain rites for the whole month of *Śrāvāṇa*. The dance is most remarkable for some miraculous performances. Manasā worship is very popular in Kamakhya and each family worships Manasā, or the manuscript of *Manasākāvya* is preserved therein. Thus the cult shows its popularity in Assam, and it is very significant particularly in Lower Assam.

Manasā, who is also considered as a Sākta goddess is a living and powerful cult in Assam and Manasā is worshipped with much adoration and ceremony. During her worship the Manasā songs are recited with proper musical instruments and dancing movements.<sup>24</sup> These songs are sectarian and were composed just to glorify the worship of the powerful goddess. The songs give us an account of the growth and spread of the Manasā cult in Assam. The cult of Manasā popular among the non-Aryan people of the province in the beginning, could thus gain popularity among the upper classes of the Hindu society. The volumes of literature while dealing with the cult, depict as well the cultural and religious history of mediaeval Assam. So the scholars should pay more attention to intensive and comparative study of this Manasā cult.

<sup>22</sup> Medhi, K. R : 1949 : *Ankawali, Introduction*.

<sup>23</sup> Barua, B. K : 1941 : *Assamese Literature*.

<sup>24</sup> Barua, B. K : 1953 : *Studies in Early Assamese Literature*.

**A NOTE ON  
SOME ARCHAEOLOGICAL RELICS IN AND AROUND  
BARPATHAR ( GOLAGHAT ) ASSAM : AN APPRISAL.**

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In March 1978, while I went to Barpathar and other areas on Departmental duty I noticed two egg-shaped pits measuring 180 cms×150 cms×120 cms, situated side by side in the compound of a family residential house at Kardaiguri. I collected a large piece of rim of a big earthen jar from the owner of the house who found it inside one of the pits at a depth of 30cms. The discovery of the said object prompted me to explore and to salvage the site for finding out more such hidden objects underneath the pits, and we accordingly carried out exploration and salvaging work at Kardaiguri, Dubarani, Tengani, Telishal, Upper Langtha, Pabhajan, etc. in Barpathar, Golaghat in March 1979. A short description of our finds is given here in order to draw attention of the scholars interested in the subject.

**1. Finds from Rajabari Dubarani site :** A team of the Department of Anthropology including myself from Dibrugarh University visited the above site. P. Buragohain, presented one bird-medallion, now indentified as that of a peacock, found at a depth of 45 cms in his land, to our department. Then the entire area of Rajabari Dubarani was found to posses rich archaeological remains.

So, under the above circumstances, the entire Dubarani site, measuring about 40 bighas of land was intensively explored during March 1979. A number of brick made plinths which were probably destroyed by natural calamities like earthquake, rain, storm, etc. in remote past have also been located. An extensive area in Dubarani, measuring 40 bighas of land is said to have been surrounded by a badly damaged brick wall. Traces of outer ruined high ramparts extending from East to West are to be seen. There are two tanks measuring about 1 *bigha* and 2 *katha* respectively in the south-east and outside the inner wall of the ruined habitation site. The age to which the bricks and the brick strucrure are to be ascribed, is

yet to be determined. At least some of the bricks belong to pre-Ahom age.

A number of trenches have been dug inside the compound of Rajabari. But atleast in one such trench a number of stone pieces with Brahmi letters engraved there on have been discovered at a depth of 120 cms. The following letters were found in situ and these have been identified as follows:

A(অ), Ā(আ), I(ই), GA(গ), JA(জ), VA(ব), MA(ম), YA(য), RA(র) ; // (it may either stand for numerical 2, or double stop. It is interesting to note that there are different types of অ and আ engraved on stone pieces.

**Other objects of archaeological interest :** 1. A scally fish engraved on a stone slab ; 2. A stone clsp. 3. A stone ball ; 4. Various designs on stone plates ; 5. Potsherds of big earthen jar ; 6. Terracotta lion ; 7. Profile view of a lower part of a female figurine made on terracotta plaque ; 8. Model of a hand of a female figurine made on terracotta plaque ; 9. Front view of a Peacock medallion? engraved on stone ; 10. Profile view of a stone image ; 11. Broken pieces of a stone ball unearthed at a depth of 30cms ; 12. A stone mortar recovered at a depth of 30cms (presented) ; 13. A mini-cymbal, (two pieces with holes at the centre) found at a depth of 30cms.

The most interesting part of our discovery is that letter (Ā) is found inscribed on a flat piece of stone slab at one of its corners. An unidentified animal like figure has also been engraved on its right side. The other part contains geometrical and floral designs. It was found in situ at a depth of 120cms in a trench along with the other stone pieces with scripts. According to Dr. P. C. Choudhury, ex-prof. of History, Dibrugarh University, this stone piece represents the rays of the sun with the letter sū(rya) or Ā(ditya) engraved at the bottom. A scally fish engraved on a stone slab has been found at a depth of 120cms along with the inscribed stone pieces. This motif may be considered as the sign of fertility cult. A section of the population of Assam especially the Chutiyas consider the scally fish as the sign of prosperity. Dr. Choudhury is of opinion that this motif also occurs in some of the megalithic remains of the Kachari royal family.

A broken ball (sling ball) has been unearthed at a depth of 30cms in the same trench. Such stone balls were discovered at Mahenjadaro as well. It may be noted, however, that stone balls were used for war purposes by some royal families of Assam.



Floral and geometrical designs : A number of stone pieces having beautiful floral and geometrical designs have also been unearthed in situ at a depth of 60 cms to 120 cms.

A mini clay-sarai in a broken condition was found in situ at a depth of 45cms on the side of a plinth in the trench No 11 in the same site. It is some what similar to that found at Marakdola excavation site in Kamrup district.

Mini cymbal : A pair of mini cymbal made of iron was handed over to us by a local labourer. He reported that he found it at a depth of 60cms while digging a hole to transplant a banana plant in the said habitation site. The diameter of the cymbals is 6.3 cms.

A mortar : A mortar made of stone measuring 26cms in length and 15½cms in breadth was also handed over to us by a local labourer who got it last year while hoeing his sugar cane field near the Dubarani site.

Peacock-medallion ? : It was engraved on a big piece of stone in frontal view. The beak and the head of the bird are almost defaced probably on account of natural wear and tear. The other parts viz, legs with claws, spreading wings, etc., are, of course very beautifully engraved and preserved. The specimen according to Dr. M. N. Bora of Dibrugarh University is an unique one and first of its kind so far found in N. E. India. It may be noted that the symbol of peacock appears on some Gupta coins, and the tradition has been kept alive in all parts of India.

2. Upper Langtha site : The site is situated at a distance of about 8 k. m. east of Barapathar Railway station. An area was explored and then a trench dug. The following artefacts have been unearthed in situ at a depth of 60cms to 90 cms.

A large and heavy stone outlet measuring 155cms in length, 54 cms in breadth and 15cms thickness, believed to be the outlet of a Siva temple, has been unearthed. It is still lying in situ. The groove measures 7cms in breadth and 9cms in depth. It was learnt from the local people that a Siva linga was already removed from the above site and handed over to the Management of the Siva temple, situated near Dubarani.

A terracotta lion : The lion is made on a terracotta plaque in a profile view. It measures as follows: 56cms in length, 37cms in breadth and 6.1cms in thickness.

It may be presumed that the symbol of the lion was engraved on terracotta following the tradition of the Ashokan pillars. Though

the lion symbol is Budhistic as well as Indo-Aryan, it seems that the Tibeto-Burmans, the Chutiyas and the Kacharis also used it as art motifs, as may be seen in their remains.

A lower part of a Terracotta female figurine : It is ornamented with circular rings, from the waist upto the knee joint,. The posture of the figurine seems to be in kneeling position and in profile view. The design can be compared with that of an Assamese embroidered lower garments (*bota-bocha mekhela*). The plaque measures 18.3cms in length, 6cms in breadth and 15.1cms in height.

A complete decorated terracotta female hand: It is in an upright and dancing position and measures 18.8 cms in length, 4.7cms in breadth and 14.5 cms in height.

A large number of terracotta plaques with floral designs have been unearthed in situ and at a depth of 30cms to 90cms. These terracotta finds seem to belong to an early period, though not as early as the Dubarani finds, particularly those with alphabets.

3. **Finds from Kardaiguri site :** Kardaiguri is situated at a distance of 3km. west of Barapathar Railway station. The owner of the land reported that they already removed a top layer of soil about 30 cms in depth from the place since 1932. Prior to that the area was covered with dense forest. He repored that he first noticed the upper level of the pits in 1962.

Two pits were found situated side by side. The pits are egg-shaped.

The trenches were dug upto the depth of 120 cms. The trenches themselves were made of burnt clay. A large number of broken pieces of potsherds of big earthen jars, possibly two, were recovered from inside the pits. Lumps of charcoal, ashes were also unearthed from the said pits. It is believed that the pits were made for preservation of some valuable objects by the inhabitants of the locality in the past. We are sending the samples of charcoal to the Secretary, Rado-Carbon Dating Committee, PRL, Ahmedabad for scientific analysis and for  $C_{14}$  dating. The articles may stand as well for a gun-powder factory which was kept hidden.

4. **Finds from Tengani site :** The site is situated at a distance of 5km. east of Dubarani. Only exploration work was done here. A habitation site called Rajabari containing about 100 bighas of land covered with jungles has been located. The compound is surrounded by a ditch. There is a road and also an outlet for boatmen leading to the Dhansiri river which is flowing by the side of the Rajabari.

The forest villagers of the Tengani forest reserve found a stone image of Lord Visnu or Sūryya along with a model of a stone conch-shell which was installed atop a small hill. They propitiate this deity for the welfare of the villagers. The most important characteristic features of the deity are : it is depicted on a chariot drawn by group of seven horses and Ganesa and Kartika are inscribed on right and left hand sides respectively of the deity. Four female attendants are also engraved at its four corners. All these images are engraved on a single piece of stone.

A number of stone boulders were noticed under a big tree outside Rajabari. Excellent workmanship is noticed in one of the boulders. Four small pyramid-shaped artefacts were found by the side of the boulders and two of them were collected for our Department. Probably, the stone engravers could not complete their work for some unknown reasons.

**5. Finds from Pabhajan Tea Estate :** A stone image of Goddess Pārvati, consort of Siva was located inside the Pabhajan T. E. The local people mostly the Hindu labourers occasionally propitiate the Goddess for their individual and family welfare.

A stone idol believed to be that of Lord Siva was presented to us by the Manager of Bhagaban T. E.. It was reported that this idol was brought from Pabhajan T. E. where it was originally found by some local boys. The people used to propitiate the deity for blessings. The stone idol was engraved in the profile view on a single piece of stone. It is considered to be the most important idol collected so far in N. E. India.

**6. Finds from Telisal site :** It is situated about 11 km. on the northeast from Barapathar Railway station. A Hindu Goddess, believed to be Goddess Kali with four hands, a Siva linga and many other unidentified materials were lying scattered in the area. The newly settled population, mostly the Bodo-Kacharis, occasionally appease this deity for their welfare.

There is also a stone image believed to be that of Lord Visnu located at a distance of about 1 km. from the above mentioned site. The idol is surrounded by a brick-made circular rampart. The Local people occasionally propitiate it for their social well being.

There are two big tanks, called Vishnu *pukhuri* and Joy *pukhuri* to the east of the above mentioned Visnu idol. Probably the people who inhabited this part of land in the past carried the stone boulders from the neighbouring Naga hills.

**Discussion on the finds :** 1. Dubarani finds: The finds especially the letters are almost similar to Brahmi scripts projected in the

Badganga Rock inscription<sup>1</sup>. The scripts seem to belong to 5th-6th Century A.D. almost conclusively as these letters tally with the Badganga Rock inscription (ibid) issued by king Bhutivarman (c 510-555). Moreover, few letters are also found similar to those inscribed on Umachal Rock inscription issued by king Surendravaman<sup>2</sup> (450-485 A. D.). To quote Dr. P. C. Choudhury "the accession of Bhūtivārman son of Nārāyana during the middle of the 6th Century A.D. was a land mark in the early history of Kāmarūpa. Both his own Badganga epigraph and the Nidhanpur plates bear witness to the new vigour that was added to the kingdom already growing in importance at the cost of neighbouring powers. On the basis of his epigraph his reign may be placed between A. D. 510-555. This long reign of 45 years appears reasonable in view of his most eventful career and conquest in all directions"<sup>3</sup> If it is so, then we may presume that the Varman civilization might have been extended upto the Dayang-Dhansiri belt.

The Duburani scripts are believed to be the mother of Assamese scripts. Verma says" these epigraphs show that the Assamese scripts can seek their parentage to the Brahmi-scripts which later on developed in North India in proto regional scripts, popularly called by the palaeographers *kutilya* or acute angle or *sidhamatrika* scripts. This in due course of time developed into proto Nagari and Nagari. The Assamese happens to belong to this family of scripts.<sup>4</sup>

The motif behind the engraving of the scally fish on the stone slab may be that the engraver's idea was either to depict the fertility cult or to recall the *matsya avatāra* current in Hindu philosophy. The various types of floral as well as geometrical designs engraved on stone plates unearthed at situ are also believed to be the examples of ancient art and culture that once flourished in the above area.

The peo-cock bird medallion, a rare specimen in North East India, may as well be considered as a sign of spread of Aryan civilization in this part of our country.

2. Upper langtha site : At this initial stage of our work, it is difficult to suggest the age of the finds. Ofcourse, the beautiful terracotta lion is an unique and rare find so far found in Assam ; a

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Verma T. P. : *Dev of Script in Ancient Kāmarūpa* p.47

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, P. 46

<sup>3</sup> *History of Civilisation of the people of Assam*, P. 143

<sup>4</sup> Verma, P. 31

lower part of the female figurine and other geometrical and floral designs engraved on terracotta plaques are believed to be of later period than the inscribed stone pieces and other materials unearthed at Dubarani. We can also believe that at one time a temple was built on the above site, but later on it was destroyed by natural calamities.

3. Kardaiguri finds : The two egg-shaped pits located more or less side by side may be called preservation pits, which were probably used for preservation of important articles by the people in the past. Many broken potsherds were found in the pits. If we compare Kardaiguri potsherds with the potsherds excavated at Marakdola and Ambari in Kamrup, Assam, then we may presume that the former finds are older than the latter one. Of-course the date of the Kardaiguri finds may be confirmed after receiving the report from Ahmedabad for which we sent charcoal samples for C<sub>14</sub> analysis.

The finds of the other sites viz, Visnu or Sūryya murti of Tengani, Devi murti of Pabhajan and Telishal, Visnu murti of Telishal, a large number of tanks in Dayang Dhansiri belt are also believed to be ancient relics of Pre-Ahom period, indicating the spread of the Indo-Aryan culture to that remote area under the Kāmarūpa rulers.

Our main task is to determine the founders of this ancient civilization in Dayang-Dhansiri belt. It is evident from Assam History that ancient Upper Assam (Saumar pith) was predominantly inhabited by the Tibeto-Burmans i.e., the Chutiyas and the Kacharis. They were later on conquered by the Shans. It is of course, still not known when the Tibeto-Burmans especially the Chutiyas and the Kacharis entered N. E. India. But they constitute one of the early waves of the Indo-Mongoloid people and early inhabitants of the region. They established royal dynasties even before the coming of the Tai Ahom. It is almost certain that a section of the Chutiyas came into contact with the Indo-Aryan group of people particularly in Northern bank of the Brahmaputra valley prior to 11th Century A.D. The spread of Aryan culture among the Chutiyas followed after long contact with the advance group of the Indo Aryan People.

Referring to the Nagajuri-Khanikar script, Dr. P. C. Choudhury said that the above script belonged to later part of the 6th Century A. D. or early part of the 7th Century A. D.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Dr. M. M. Sarma says that the script was an example of spreading

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<sup>5</sup> JARS, Vol. XX, P. 4.



of Aryan civilization right up to Sarupathar in the early part of the 5th Century A. D.<sup>6</sup> If it is so, we may also suppose that Aryan culture and civilization flourished right upto the Dayang-Dhansiri belt. The Tibeto Burmans i.e. the Chutiyas and the Kacharis were thus influenced by the culture and religion of the Indo-Aryan people of western India. Ofcourse, it is too early to draw any conclusion at this stage of our work regarding our finds, as these materials are very limited. We believe, this may be confirmed after further intensive exploration, salvaging and excavation work in the extensive Dayang-Dhansiri belt.\*

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<sup>6</sup> *Adhyana Parichaya*, ed. N. Saikia, P. 162

\* There is no script as such among the ruins, but only a few letters which can hardly be compared with those inscribed in the stone from Khanikargaon. The finds from the scattered regions are relics of a fused Indo-Kachari civilization of the Dayang-Dhansiri valley.—*Editor*

## THE TURKO—AFGHAN AND MUGHAL INVASIONS OF TRIPURĀ (HILL-TIPPERĀH) RĀJ (1240-1733 A.D.)

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**Introductory Remarks :** The early part of the Thirteenth Century constituted a landmark in the medieval history of North-Eastern India. Every possible attempts and strenuous efforts have been made to lift the veil of mystery bearing on the subject under review and to present, as far as possible a systematic, descriptive, graphic and critical account thereof in chronological order. The study is based on persian annals, native chronicle, standard historical records, and some other contemporary and original sources.

**Its Causes :** In persuasion of the imperial policy of extending their Empire right from the border of Eastern Bengal to the confines of China by subjugating and subduing the various neighbouring hill chiefs or Rajas and annexing their territories to their dominions the Turko-Afghans as well as the Mughals felt it warranted to conquer this Hindu State. It is also to be noted here that the Mughal's North-East Frontier policy of getting the free access to the forest and compelling the hill chiefs to pay the revenue was greatly resisted by all the Rajas. In addition to these, the occasional fratricidal war also afforded an excellent opportunity to the Mughals to embark upon the career of aggression and the Raja's policy of employing and providing shelter to the portuguese pirates and displaying the sympathetic attitude to them who were in constant war with the Mughals under their leader Sebastian Gonsalez also enraged and inflamed the political passion of the Mughals. The combination and interaction of all these factors furnished the occasions and the pretexts for the eruption of hostilities.

**Array of Events :** According to the most reliable tradition though un-recorded in Persian Annals, the first Turko-Afghan invasion of Tripura took place in 1240 A.D. When the Pathan Governor of Meherkul Hiravant Khan despatched some troops to plunder the territory and at his request the Turki Sultan of Bengal also advanced further to invade Tripurā, the reigning King Kirtidhara alias Chengthum-Pha, being seized with fears sued for dishonourable peace but his wife Queen

Tripura Sundari, who was quite an "Amazon", being animated by the spirit of patriotism played such a chivalrous role at this critical juncture which will be considered a memorable chapter in the Medieval History of India as a saga of her dash and excellent gallantry. She persuaded her husband to fight gallantly against the invaders and herself took the command and after giving a feast to Kuki tribes and other Tripurā troops made combined attack on Gaur Army and by inflicting the crushing defeat on Pathan General Hiravant Khan drove them back with great slaughter. Meherkul passed under the political sway of Tripurā. As Dr. S. K. Chatterjee states :

"This was perhaps the first victory of the Southern Indo-Mongoloids over the Turks from Bengal"<sup>1</sup>. About the role of Kuki tribes he further says : "The Kukis of Tripurā as subjects of the Tripurā Kings took prominent part in the fight which the king gave to Muhammadans".<sup>2</sup>

As early as the Thirteenth Century, when Tipperah had reached some degree of material prosperity, Muhammad Toghril Khan, in persuasion of the policy of annexing the Hindu states to Turko-Afghan dominion invaded in the year 1279 A.D. Numerous references to this invasion have been made by various authors<sup>3</sup>, but all of them have failed to trace out the real causes of this invasion. Dr. S.K. Chatterjee<sup>4</sup> is also not very clear as to the historical background of this invasion. Regarding its historical background only E.F. Sandys in his report<sup>5</sup> states that about 1270 A.D. a Hindu Chaudhury while passing through the territory of Tripurā Raja on his way to the Court of the Muhammadan Subadar at Gaur complained that he had been robbed while passing through Tripura and had not obtained justice at the hands of Tripurā officials. The Subadar was very glad to have an excuse for making an interference and afterwards invaded Tripurā with a large army but was repulsed. Hari, the ninety-seventh Raja had 18 (eighteen) sons. Ratna-Phā through one of the youngest was considered the most intelligent and

<sup>1</sup> *Kirāta-Jana-Krti* (A.S.B. Calcutta, 1974), p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> C. U. Aitchison, *A collection of Treaties, engagements and Sanads*, (Calcutta, 1930), Vol. II, p. 193 ; W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal* (London 1876), Vol-VI, p. 359 ; *Imperial Gazetteer of India* (hereafter abbrev. as *I.G.I.*), 1908, p. 606.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. Cit.*, 132.

<sup>5</sup> Vide, *Bengal and Assam, Bihar and Orissa* (B.A.B.O) (Compiled by Somerset Playne and Edited by Arnold Wright, London 1917), p. 464.

wise but was sent by his father to travel abroad and gain experience. He visited and resided at the court of the Subadar and during his stay Raja Hari died and an elder son ascended. After that Ratna-Phā asked Toghril Khan, the Subadar of the Emperor Balban of Delhi to help him to gain the Raj. This request afforded the Subadar an excellent opportunity for retrieving the lost name and fame by taking revenge of the former defeat. Ratna-Phā<sup>6</sup> (1279-1323) with the help of the Muhammadan Army invaded Tripurā, forced his father Dangar-Phā to flee to the hills where he died and defeated his brother and beheaded him and himself became King. This fact is further corroborated by Charles Stewart<sup>7</sup>, who contends that in the year 678 Hijri (A.D. 1279) with the help of numerous army he invaded the country of Jainagar. After having defeated the Raja in a general engagement, he plundered the inhabitants and brought away with him immense wealth and one hundred elephants (Hunter mentions 160 elephants). Why is Tripurā called Jainagar is not clear, though Farishta mentions Jainagar to the east of Brahmaputra and perhaps means Tripurā. According to Prof. K. R. Qanungo<sup>8</sup>, Ratna-Phā (c. 1275)—1290) a contemporary of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Balban, was first defeated by Sultan Mughisuddin Tughril about 1280 and subsequently he submitted. But this statement lacks general support. Whatever the truth may be, it is admitted that after the fulfilment of his purpose, Ratna-Phā presented the Subadar with a valuable ruby and in return for this the title of "Mānikya" (a perfect ruby of certain size and shape) was bestowed on him by the Sultan. This title has been borne by the Rajas of Tripurā ever since.

During the reign of Pratap Manikya, Iliyas Shah invaded Tripurā in the middle of the fourteenth century, probably in the year 1345 and plundered the country.<sup>9</sup>

During the reign of Dharma Manikya (1407-58) Haji Shamsuddin King of Bengal invaded the dominion of the Raja of Trpperāh and compelled him to pay a great sum of money and to give him a number of valuable elephants with which he returned in triumph to his capital. Dharma Manikya in turn attacked and defeated the king of Bengal, Sultan Ahmed Shah and plundered his capital at Sonargaon.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> S. K. Chatterjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 132.

<sup>7</sup> *History of Bengal*, (Calcutta-1910) p. 70.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted by Dr. S. K. Chatterjee, *OP. Cit.*, p. 132.

<sup>9</sup> W. W. Hunter, *OP. Cit.*, P. 359 ; *B. A. B. O.*, P. 464 ; *I. G. I.* 1908, p. 606.

<sup>10</sup> Vide *B. A. B. O.* -Report of E. F. Sandys, P. 465.

An interregnum occurred till 1490 when Dhanya Manikya (1490-1520) ascended the throne. During the reign of this Raja Tripurā was at the zenith of its progress. In 1512 the Raja sent his General Chuchug Rai to attack the important Muhammadan Garrison at Chittagong which was later named as Islamabad. When the Tipperah General conquered Chittagong<sup>11</sup> and defeated the Gaur troops who defended it, Hussain Shah was sent at the head of the vast army gathered from the twelve provinces of Bengal to invade Tripurā. But the Tipperāh army made a dike across Gumti, and after confining the water for three days, broke the embankment and the torrent forced the Turko-Afghan troops to retreat.<sup>12</sup> Many Pathan soldiers lost their lives. Shortly after this disastrous failure the Pathans again invaded Tripurā under Haitan Khan and attempted to capture Udaipur, but they were similarly drowned by an artificial flood created in the narrow valley below Debtamore. The third attempt of Turko-Afghan was also frustrated at Kasba. Dr. S. K. Chatterjee<sup>13</sup> attributes the defeat of the Turko-Afgans to the play of some magic rites by witches from certain scheduled caste. But this statement is not confirmed by other authorities. While describing a clear picture of this event E. F. Sandys<sup>14</sup> informs us that being impressed by the excellent Pathan cavalry, the Raja of Tripurā engaged a large number of Mogul Sawars. When a thousand of them mutinied for arrears of pay and marched on Chittagong, and then to Tripurā Garrison, the mutineers were overtaken and defeated and many captured Pathan soldiers were beheaded alive at the temple of the Chaudadevata at Udaipur. To avenge this sacrificial slaughter the Pathan King sent a force of three thousand cavalry and six thousand infantry under Muhammad Khan. At first he was successful, and the Tripurā Raja lost commanders but shortly after the Pathans were defeated and their General was captured. He too was sent in a cage to the temple and sacrificed to the Chaudadevatas. All the cannons, banners and trophies of war captured in this war from the Pathans by Tripura soldiers are still preserved at Agartala.

After the death of Dhanya Manikya in 1520 the Turko-Afghans under Sultan Nasrath Shah invaded Tripurā and defeated his son Deva Manikya (150-35) at Islamabad (Chittagong)<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> *M. S. Rājmalā* (Bengali Edn. compiled by Pandit Vaneshvar and Sukreshvara, Edited by Kali Prasana Sen, Pub. in Tripurā Erā-1337 A. D. 1927) Vol. II, PP. 174-178.

<sup>12</sup> W. W. Hunter, *OP. Cit.*, F. 465; *B. A. B. O.*, P. 465.

<sup>13</sup> *OP. Cit.*, P. 113.

<sup>14</sup> Ref. to *B. A. B. O.*, P. 465.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 465.



Vijoy Manikya (1528-9-1570) or (1535-83 A. D.)<sup>16</sup>, the most capable and powerful ruler fought with the Pathans from Bengal and inflicted a crushing defeat on Pathan Army under Mubarak Khan, despatched by the Sultan of Bengal, Sulaiman Kirani. The Mughals were defeated at Chittagong also. Collecting an Army of Twenty six thousand infantry and five thousand cavalry the Raja sent them over the Meghna in five thousand boats to Sonargaon, the Mughal capital of Bengal and contended himself by making the country waste. Abul Fazl<sup>17</sup> states that the Raja had a force of two thousand footmen and thousand elephants and horses with the help of which he defeated the Mughal army who defended Chittagong and occupied parts of Sylhet and Noakhali. In this war the captured Mughal General was beheaded as a sacrifice at the altar of the Goddess Kali at Tripurā's capital Udaipur. According to Dr. S. K. Chatterjee<sup>18</sup> the pathan Sultan Daud Khan being engaged in life and death struggle with Mughals failed to take revenge.

Ananta Manikya (1583-85) the son of Vijoy Manikya declared war against the Mughal Raja Sikandar Shah but was repulsed owing to the assistance of Portuguese gunners whom the Mughal Raja engaged. Ananta Manikya sent a large army under the command of his three sons, against Sikandar Shah; one of the sons was killed by a wounded elephant. The Mughals followed up their victory, marched on Rangamati and sacked the capital. Gopi Prasad the Commander-in-Chief of Tripurā strangled Ananta Manikya and set himself as Udai Manikya (1585-96).<sup>19</sup>

Amar Manikya (1597-1611) also fought very bravely with Mughal Generals, but in spite of the initial success, he lost the battle and was taken as a prisoner to Dacca and afterwards was allowed to go on pilgrimage to Varanasi and Brindaban where he died.<sup>20</sup>

Before his death Isa Khan, the Chief of Bhati, comprising the vast territories of the present Tipperāh District, is believed to be an ally of Raja of Tripurā. According to popular tradition this title, Masnad-i-Alqī (Sublime throne) is believed to have been given to Isa Khan by the Emperor Akbar, but according to Tripurā

<sup>16</sup> Dr. D. C. Sircar, *Journal of the Asiatic Society letters*, 1951, Vol. XVII, Nos. 180, P. 77.

<sup>17</sup> H. S. Jarrett, *Ain-i-Akbari* (A. S. B. Calcutta 1891) Vol. II, PP. 117 F, 134 F; *I. G. I.*, 1908, P. 606.

<sup>18</sup> *OP. Cit.*, P. 134.

<sup>19</sup> *B. A. B. O.*, P. 466.

<sup>20</sup> S. K. Chatterjee, *OP. Cit.*, P. 135.

Chronicle<sup>21</sup> this title was confirmed upon him by Amar Manikya. But there is neither any historical evidence in support of this popular belief nor do we find any other evidence corroborating the statement of this chronicle.

Despite the several sinister attempts made by the Mughals against the Kingdom of Tripurā, the Rajas held their ground bravely for three centuries and it was not until the beginning of the seventeenth century that the Mughals obtained any footing in the country. Abul Fazal's<sup>22</sup> statement that during Akbar's reign only "the whole of Eastern Bengal on the right side of the Brahmaputra was annexed" also confirms this truth that Tripurā was out of the domain of Mughal rule. Mr. Samuel Purchas's<sup>23</sup> description of India is also a reliable testimony to the continuous or incessant war of the King of Tripurā (Tipperāh) with the Mogor (Mogul) during the reign of Echebar (Akbar). But he has failed to provide the details.

During the reign of Jahangir the first Mughal invasion took place when Rajadhar Manikya (1611-13) was on the Tripura throne, but the first attempt of the Mughals dashed to the ground as Tripurā Raja's troops chased them away. During the reign of Jasadhar Manikya (1613-23) many interesting scenes of battle appeared on the political stage of Tripurā. The Mughal invasion of Tripurā under Nawab Fateh Jang in 1620 is a memorable episode. Aitchison's<sup>24</sup> information that the invaded in 1625 is perhaps wrong.

Mirza Nathan<sup>25</sup> narrates Tripurā invasions thus : "One regiment consisting of more than two thousand and seven hundred cavalry, four thousand matchlock-men and twenty famous elephants was sent under the command of Mirja Isfandiyar, son of Hasan Beg Khan-Shaykh-Umari. The second regiment consisting of more than three thousand cavalry, five thousand matchlock-men and fifty elephants was despatched under the command of Mirja Nuruddin and Masand-i-Ala Musa Khan. A fleet of three thousand war boats with large equipments was sent under the command of Amiral Bahadur Khan, an officer of the Khan Fateh-Jang". After crossing the Brahmaputra when two land armies

<sup>21</sup> *Rājmalā*, Vol-II, P. 192.

<sup>22</sup> H. Blochmann, *Ain-i-Akbari* (Delhi 1965), Vol. I. P. 362.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. J. T. Wheeler, *Early Travels in India* (16th & 17th Century) (Delhi 1975), P. 13.

<sup>24</sup> *Op. Cit.*, Vol-II, p. 193.

<sup>25</sup> *Baharistan-i-Ghāybi* (Trans. by Dr. M. I. Borah, Gauhati, 1936), Vol. I, Ch. IV. 511.

and one naval force traversing the stages arrived at Kawailagarh, the Raja of Tipperāh planned to lead a night attack against the Imperial Officers. He came out with a force of one thousand cavalry, sixty thousand infantry and two hundred elephants and at midnight fell upon Mirza-Isfandiyar who had already reached the vicinity of Udaipur (capital of Tipperāh during the period). In this fierce battle many were killed and wounded on both sides. But soon wheel of fortune turned in favour of the Mughal Army. The Mughals won the laurels of victory and the Raja of Tipperāh leaving behind many of his followers, to be killed, ran away as a wanderer to the desert. The imperialists captured seventy of his elephants as booties, and the victory which they were crowned with may be considered as one of the leading victories of any army<sup>26</sup>.

After reaching Udaipur the Raja despatched his fleet by the river and an army by land against the imperial fleet, with the instruction to block the passage of the fleet by constructing bridges on the river from one end to the other and by erection of forts on either side. The Sardars of the Raja of Tipperah, responding to the order made sincere efforts for accomplishing the work. But when the imperial fleet after becoming triumphant reached Udaipur along with the land army, the Tipperāh Raja had fled with his wife and children. Mughal soldiers entered the hills and jungles in the search of Raja. The imperial army continuously pursued him. By chance one of the slaves of Mirza Nurud-Din followed by a Mughal of Mirza Isfandiyar arrived at the top of the hill. They saw a few women walking one after another. When this slave tried to catch one of these women, she shrieked and the Raja, who was hiding under a tree came out and struck on the head of this slave with his sword and when raised the hand to give another blow, the Raja, cried aloud "I am the Raja of Tipperāh". then the slave held back his sword and caught hold of the waist of the Raja. But Raja ran away and the slave being seriously injured fell senseless shouting to the Mughal—"I have finished his job, do not let him go". Mirza Nurud-Din, Mirza Isfandiyar and Musa Khan all ran away and made the Raja captive<sup>27</sup>. The wives of Raja were also captured along with the jewels, the jewelled weapons and a big treasure. The imperial forces stayed there for few days and seized all the elephants of the Raja which had been let loose. From there, blowing the trumpet of victory they reached Udaipur. The news of this victory was reported by the Khan Fatheh-Jang to the Sublime Court. Raja of Tipperāh and his family

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 537.

<sup>27</sup> *Baharistan-i-Ghāybi*, Vol. I, pp. 538, 554-555.

and other belongings were brought to Musa Khan. They were highly honoured. Mirja Nathan's account is incomplete here. According to some other authorities<sup>28</sup>, after the fall of the capital Udaipur was taken by Nawab Fateh Jang ; the Raja was sent to the Emperor at Delhi as a prisoner where he was offered his throne again on condition of paying annual tribute of elephants. But the Raja refused to do so and ultimately returned to Brindaban where he died in his seventy-second year. It is to be noted here that one of the important causes of Mughal attack on Tripura was the sympathetic attitude of Raja towards Portuguese pirates who were in constant war with the Mughals under their leader Sebastian Gonzalez, the founder of their fortified settlement in the Island of Sondip. The Raja's policy of employing and providing shelter to the Portuguese enraged the Mughals and inflamed their political passion. Secondly the Emperor of Delhi required a great and regular supply of elephants for state and war purposes and the Hills of Tripura abounding with great number of these animals tempted the Mughals for their frequent invasion and demand them as a tribute. After this war came to an end, the Mughal troops continued to occupy the country and Sarkar Udaipur was formed and governed until after two and half years, they were forced by an epidemic to retire.

During the reign of Kalyan Manikya (1625-1659) the Delhi Emperor reiterated his claim to tribute when the Raja refused to pay. The Emperor attempted to enforce the demand through the Nawab of Murshidabad who again invaded the country, but ultimately met with a disastrous defeat. During his reign of twenty-four years there was incessant conflicts with the increasing Mughal power but towards the end Kalyan Manikya had to submit to Sultan Suja Khan. Grants' contention that they were not conquered by the Muhammadans until the reign of Shah Jahan (A. D. 1628-39) can be proved wrong on the basis of the preceding and following arguments.

Towards the end of the seventeenth century when Tripura's progress reached the high water mark, Ratna Manikya (1684-1712) shook off the Mughal yoke. Hunter's<sup>29</sup> argument that during his reign, "the heir or Jubraj became obnoxious by his cruelty, Shaista Khan, Nawab of Bengal took him prisoner and sent him to Delhi seem to be confused interpretation of the fact. Stewart basing his

<sup>28</sup> W.W. Hunter, *Op. Cit.* Vol. VI, p. 466 ; Aitchison, *Op. Cit.* p. 193 ;  
[Vide E.F. Sandys Report. cf. *B.A.B.O.* p-466.]

<sup>29</sup> *OP. Cit.* P.466.

arguments on the best fourteen Mohammadan historians of Mughal period states that the long continued efforts were made by various Mughal Kings and Governors to bring the Tripurā Raja under Mughal yoke but all failed. This effort continued during the reign of Ratna Manikya and the Govt. of Nawab Nazim Muhammad Murshid Kuli Khan, the greatest of the Mughal Subedar of Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and the founder of Murshidabad, the last seat of Mughal Govt. in Bengal. To quote him<sup>30</sup> "The Rajas of Tripura, Cooch Bihar and Assam whose countries although had been overrun by the Muhammadan Army, had never been perfectly subdued and who therefore continued to spread the umbrella of independence and to stamp the coins in their own natives and were so improved with the idea of the power and abilities of Mohammad Kuli Khan that they forwarded him valuable presents consisting of elephants, wrought and un-wrought, ivory musk, amber and various other articles in token of their submission, in return for which the Nawab sent them Khilates or honorary dresses by the..... and putting one of which they acknowledged his superiority".

When in 1728 A. D. or 1730, Jagat Ram took refuge with a Muhammadan Zeminder named Aka Sadik and asked for his assistance in recovering the gaddi usurped by his great grand father Chattra Manikya, Mir Habbib, the Dewan of Naib Nizam of Dacca, taking this opportunity for annexing Tripurā to Mughal dominion asked his permission to invade the country. The Mughal troops after crossing the Brahmaputra reached the capital under the guidance of Jagat Ram and opposed his rivals who fled to hills, and Jagat Ram having been placed on the throne assuming the title of Mukanda Manikya, promised to pay all arrears of tribute and submitted before the Mughal authority. A large number of Troops were posted in the conquered country. Mir Habbib appointed Aqe Sadiq as Faujdar of Tipperāh. The Nawab invested Murshid Kuli Khan with the title of "Bahadur" and conferred on Mir Habbib the title of Khan. Thus the province of Tripurā which from time immemorial had been an independent Kingdom was annexed in 1733 A. D. to the Mughal Empire. Naib Nizam changed the name of Tripura as ROSHNABAD or the "Abode of Light" probably because it was the eastern limit of the Empire where the Sun first rose on the Mughal Dominions. Roshnabad was placed on the rent-roll of the Mughal Empire. The Western and Southern portions of Tripurā, which were included in the rent roll by Todal Mal, the Finance Minister of Emperor Akbar

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<sup>30</sup> *History of P Bengal*, 372.



in 1582 A. D. became a Mughal Province.<sup>31</sup> The date of subjugation of Hill Tipperah is given by different authorities as 1733 A. D. and 1739 A. D. but the year 1733 A. D. has been accepted by some of the competent authorities as the time of Tripura's subjugation.

At this period Tipperah was undoubtedly a Mughal Province of which Shamsher Jang, a Musalman, was appointed as Governor. When the people refused to obey him, the Governor set-up a puppet Raja of the old Royal family but when this afforded conciliation failed, the Governor had recourse to stronger measures but soon the people's out-cry against his repressive and oppressive policy became so great that the Nawab ordered him to be put to death. Thus the final curtain of the conflicts dropped down.

An important fact may be stated here : the Muhammadans after their conquest of Tipperāh remained in the possession of the only lowlands, and the hilly tracts to the east remained in the uninterrupted possession of Tipperah Raja but subject to the control of and tributary to the Nawab. The Mughals were prevented from reducing the hill country to the same condition as the plains which is par excellence of the native people. In fact, Hill Tipperāh in strict sense of the term never became a part of the Subba of Bengal.

**CONCLUSION :—**From the foregoing accounts it is evident that the Rajas of Hill Tipperah by offering a vigorous resistance to the imperial authority of the Turko-Afghan and Mughal rulers for nearly five centuries of Pan-Indian character not only turned but rather clogged the wheel of their progress and ultimately frustrated their sinister designs of planting the banner of crescent over the political horizon of North-Eastern India.

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<sup>31</sup> Aitchison, *OP. Cit*, P. 193 ; Hunter, *Op. Cit*, P. 466 ; B. A. B. O., P. 469 ; Gulm Hussain Salim, *Riyazu-s-Salatin* ( Trans. by Abdus Saliam, Reptd, I. A.D. Series 1975 ) PP. 300-2; A full account of Mir Habbib is given in the *MS Seiru-i-Mutakherim*, Vol. II, PP 590-91 and *MS Maa-Sir-Ul-Umara*. Vol-II., P.844.

## AGRICULTURE IN ASSAM IN THE AHOM AGE

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Agriculture was, as it is still, the main occupation of the people of Assam during the days of the Ahoms. Incentive to agricultural pursuits was given by the Ahom kings, who considered agriculture as a noble occupation and some of whom earned their living through it before becoming kings.<sup>1</sup> "Some monarchs, being overwhelmed by the besetting thorns of political intrigues, expressed a longing to return to their pastoral surroundings where they would earn their livelihood by means of ploughing in the field".<sup>2</sup> Dignity attached to agriculture was evidenced by the fact that a newly enthroned Ahom monarch had to perform the ceremony of sacrificial ploughing at the time of his coronation.<sup>3</sup> In fact every Assamese except the Brahmanas knew how to plough. This was a remarkable feature of the Assamese aristocracy in medieval Assam. The *Pāik* system,\* the pivot of the Ahom administration, the necessity of supplying food to the soldiers engaged in long-drawn wars with the Muhammadans and the needs for acquiring foreign goods in exchange for agricultural products seemed to enhance the importance of agriculture.

### Soil :

Assam's soil has been classified into three types-Red Loam soil, Laterite soil and Alluvial soil. The first type is found in some parts of Sibsagar district, the second in Sibsagar and Nowgong districts and the third in the entire areas of Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Darrang, Kamrup and Goalpara districts and parts of Sibsagar district.<sup>4</sup> Fertility in Red

<sup>1</sup> *Deodhai Asam Buranji*, ed. S. K. Bhuyan, Gauhati, 1962, p. 8, states that Sukapha (1221-1268), the founder of the Ahom kingdom, himself took to cultivation, when for three years, before his permanent establishment at Carāideo, he stayed at Hābung.

<sup>2</sup> S. K. Bhuyan, *Atan Buragohain and His Times*, Gauhati, 1957, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> S. K. Bhuyan, *Studies in the History of Assam*, Gauhati, 1966, p. 155.

<sup>4</sup> *Indian Crop Calendar*, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, 1956, pp. 5f.; P. C. Goswami, *The Economic Development of Assam*, Bombay, 1963, p. 8.

Loam soil differs greatly in different regions. It is suitable for cultivating fruit trees, especially Citrus (e.g. lime, lemon, orange, citron and shaddock), grapes and mangoes. With the help of irrigation, other crops can also be grown.

The lower level of the laterite soil has heavy loams and clays and produces good crops, particularly rice ; potatoes and sub-tropical fruits also grow well. But at higher level, the soil is unsuitable for growing crops.

Alluvial soil is the most fertile. Wide varieties of crops like rice, wheat, sugarcane, cotton, bananas and tobacco, all grow well in this type of soil.<sup>5</sup>

Thus though varied, the soil of Assam is on the whole, exceedingly fertile and well adapted to all kinds of agricultural purposes. The Persian chroniclers are unanimous in their view regarding the richness of the soil of Assam, which is greatly due to the annual inundation of the Brahmaputra.

#### Land Holdings :

All lands, cultivated or waste, belonged to the crown. The king had also exercised his right of ownership over all woods, forests, ferries, mines, etc. Though in theory, the Ahoms were governed by the principle of the right of joint conquest, it was the king who could alienate the lands for legal tenure ; but he could exercise his right only over those lands against which the occupier had no documentary evidence.<sup>6</sup>

The basis of the land tenure in Assam in the Ahom age was the Pāik system based on a procedure of exacting compulsory manual service from every adult male of the state in the age group of 16 to 50 with the exception to the Brahmanas, the nobility and the religious preceptors. Four, and later three *pāiks* formed a unit called *got*. One member of each *got* was obliged to render service to the state in rotation. During his absence from home, the other members of the *got* were expected to cultivate his land and keep him and his family supplied with food and other articles of daily use. In return for his service, each *pāik* was allotted two *purās* ( about three acres ) of best arable land called *gā-māti* free of charge. The arable or rice land in the state was subjected to re-distribution from time to time. The *pāik* had his

<sup>5</sup> Goswami, *op. cit.*, pp. 8f.

<sup>6</sup> E. A. Gait, *A History of Assam*, Revised edition, Calcutta, 1967, p. 270.

homestead and garden-lands also without limitation in extent, which he could hold as his private property and on hereditary basis and for which he had to pay a nominal annual tax.<sup>7</sup> Any one clearing land, other than the above, was allowed to hold it on payment of one rupee per *purā* per annum. He used to enjoy the fresh land so long as it was not required by the state. Besides, a *pāik* could also take possession of waste lands without any limit and free of rent and on hereditary basis.<sup>8</sup> Nobles could also reclaim waste lands with the help of their *likchaus* on similar conditions. Waste lands reclaimed by the nobles were called *khāts*.<sup>9</sup>

In the inundated parts of the country, the land was cultivated chiefly by emigrating *rāiyats* or, as they are now called, *pamuās*, who paid a plough tax. The hill tribes, who grew cotton, paid a hoe tax. Artisans and others who did not cultivate land paid a higher rate of poll tax, amounting to five rupees per head for gold washers and brass workers, and three rupees in the case of oil pressers and fishermen.<sup>10</sup>

With the growth of population, uncultivated lands were brought under cultivation, sometimes under the direct supervision of the king. One chronicle incorporated in the *Sātsari Asam Buranjī*, compiled by Dr. S. K. Bhuyan<sup>11</sup> records such an event in the reign of Suklenmung Gadgayān Rājā (1539-1552) where it is narrated that the king settled people on both banks of the Dikhau after clearing the jungles. Sometimes ten to twenty people and sometimes only one man used to clear the jungle.

Lands settled for ordinary cultivation were held directly under the state under three categories—*Kherāj* or revenue-paying, *Nisf-Kherāj* or half-revenue paying and *Lakherāj* or revenue free.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> This tax was assessed either as house tax or as poll tax or as hearth tax as the custom of the place determined. In Kamrup, it was a house tax called *Kharikatana*; in Darrang, it was a hearth tax called *Caru* and in Nowgong and Upper Assam, it was a poll tax called *Gā-dhan* on each *paik* of full age, (U.N. Gohain, *Assam Under the Ahoms*, Jorhat, 1942, p. 116.)

<sup>8</sup> T. Welsh, *Report on Assam*, 1794.

<sup>9</sup> A. Mackenzie, *History of the Relation of Government with the Hill Tribes of the North East Frontier of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1884, p. 378.

<sup>10</sup> Gait, *op. cit.*, pp. 260f.

<sup>11</sup> Gauhati University, 1964, pp. 20f.

<sup>12</sup> *Assam District Gazetteers*, Sibsagar District, Shillong 1967, pp. 280ff.

Lands granted for religious and charitable purposes were of *Lakherāj* category. They were divided into several types according to the nature of their assignment : *Brahmottar* to the Brāhmaṇas, *Dharmottar* for the support of religious institution or religions and charitable purposes such as for reading the *Bhagavata*, performing the *Nāmakīrtana* ( religious music and recital ) and supplying food to the pilgrims, *Devottar* to the temples, *Nānkar* to the Sudras of religious order and *Pirpal* to the Muhammadan *Fakirs* or mosque.<sup>13</sup> *Nisfkherāj* lands were granted to the *pujārīs* (priests) of the temples and to the *Sattrādhikārs*<sup>14</sup> (head of a Vaiṣṇava monastery). The history of *Nisfkherāj* land tenure in Assam is a curious example of the manner in which rights on lands were sometimes allowed to grow up. In course of time, *Nisfkherāj* lands were converted to *Lakherāj* and the owners enjoyed total exemption from payment of revenue. However, Candrakānta Singha imposed on these a tax called *Kharikatana* levied at the rate of six annas per *purā* per annum, which was continued by the Burmese after their occupation of the country in 1823.<sup>15</sup>

Land holding system in Kamrup was different from that of Upper Assam. As in the 17th century, it was governed by the Mughals for a considerable length of time (from 1613-1682) except with some interruptions, Kamrup followed the *parganā* system introduced by the Mughals.<sup>16</sup> After their occupation of this area, the Ahom kings retained the structure of that system to some extent. The *pāik* system was partially introduced and mixed with the *parganā* system.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly it was divided into 26 *parganās*, each of which was placed under a Choudhury, who received as remuneration certain portions of land. The *parganās* were subdivided into *tāluks* placed under the charge of a *tālukdār*. Of the 220,520 *purās* of cultivable lands in Kamrup about half was alienated for religious and other purposes.<sup>18</sup>

#### Land Survey and Measurement :

The Ahom kings also undertook survey and resurvey of lands. It appears that the first systematic survey was undertaken by king

<sup>13</sup> H. R. Dhekal Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, Calcutta, 1829, chap. III, pp. 9ff. ; Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 270 ; N. N. Acharyya, *The History of Medieval Assam*, Gauhati, 1966, p. 125.

<sup>14</sup> Jenkins, *Report on the Revenue Administration on Assam*, 1849-50, pp. 61f.

<sup>15</sup> Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

<sup>16</sup> S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*. Gauhati, 1974, p. 531.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*



Cakradhvaj Singha (1663-1671).<sup>19</sup> During the reign of Gadādhara Singha (1682-1696), a detailed survey based on the land revenue measurement of the Mughals was undertaken, which process continued till the reign of Pramatta Singha (1744-1751). 'The area of each field was calculated by measuring the four sides with a *nal* or bamboo pole, 12 feet long, and multiplying the mean length by mean breadth. The unit of the area was the *purā*, which contained four standard Bengali *bighās* of 14,400 square feet. The register was prepared which contained a list of all occupied land except homesteads, with their areas, and particulars of all rent free estates'.<sup>20</sup>

In the Keśava-Rāi Viṣṇu temple inscription of Rudra Singha (1696-1714) dated Śaka 1622 (1700 A. D.)<sup>21</sup> and the Hayagrīva Mādhava plate of Gadādhara Barphukan dated Śaka 1677 (1755)<sup>22</sup> we get mention of the word *puṭaka*, which appears to be the same as *purā*.<sup>23</sup> The Jayanīyāpur plates donating land to the temple of goddess Kālī by the wife of the Bargohain who was probably Narahari in Śaka 1724 and 1725 (1802 and 1803 A. D.) mention measure of land like *hala* and *kedāra* (modern *keyār*) which are peculiar to southern Assam and another measure *vasu-hasta-pramāṇa-māna-daṇḍa*, a measuring pole of eight cubits in length.<sup>24</sup> In four copper plates of king Śiva Singha (1714-1744) dated 1639 Śaka (1717 A. D.) occurs a measurement of *sārdha-sapta-hasta-pramāṇa-daṇḍa*, a measuring pole of seven cubits and a half.<sup>25</sup> Reference to *sāt-hatīyā tār* (seven cubit pole) is found in the Bardowa *Sattrā* dispute epigraph dated Śaka 1721 (1799 A. D.) of Kamaleswar Singha's reign (1795-1811).<sup>26</sup> An Assamese chronicle narrating the events from Suhungmung Dihingia Rājā to Pramatta Singha (1497-1751) incorporated in the *Sātsarī Asam Burañjī* states that a measurement of seven and a half cubit plus four fingers' width (*sāt hāt begat cāri āṅgul*) was introduced by king Pratāp Singha (1603-1641).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 256 ; Gohain, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

<sup>20</sup> Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

<sup>21</sup> *Prachya-Sasanavālī*, ed. M. Neog, Gauhati, 1974, plate No. 110.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, plate No. 64.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p. 135.

<sup>24</sup> Neog, *Prāchya-Śasanāvalī*, p. 135 and plates Nos. 89, 98 and 99.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, plate Nos. 17, 18, 128 and 129.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, plate No. 100.

<sup>27</sup> p. 77.

## Crops :

Rice was, as it is today, the staple crop of the country. It has three main varieties-*Śāli*, *Bāo* and *Ahu*. *Śāli* is winter rice grown by the transplanted system. It is sown in May/June, transplanted in June/July and harvested in November/December. Its finer quality is called *Lāhi*. *Ahu* is summer rice grown under the broad-cast method. It is sown in March/April and harvested in June/July. *Bāo* is stemmed rice sown broad-cast in low land in March/April and harvested in November/December. Another kind of spring rice called *Boro-Dhān* is sown (rather transplanted) in October/November and harvested in February/March.<sup>28</sup> The spring-time-sown paddy gives coarse rice. *The Yogini Tantra* enumerates nearly twenty varieties of paddy.<sup>29</sup> Early Assamese literature contains names of a hundred varieties of paddy<sup>30</sup>. The Assamese chronicles of the period seem to divide paddy into two broad varieties, fine or *Lāhi* and coarse or *Śāli*. *Cakowā* and *Barā* belonging to the *Lāhi* group are two special rice crops in Assam. *Komal cāul* or *Bokā cāul*, a specially prepared *Cakowā* raw rice soaked in water was the main food menu of the Assamese soldiers. This simple process of taking food in the battle field in marked contrast with the elaborate paraphernalia of the Mughals was often an important factor in deciding the battles in favour of the Assamese.<sup>31</sup>

Wheat, barley and millet were also cultivated but not as extensive crops.<sup>32</sup>

Assamese chronicles and contemporary literature refer to the extensive cultivation of a number of pulse crops like *Māti-mah* (*Phaseolus mungo*), *Mug* (*Phaselous aureus*), *Kalā-māh* or *Khesari* (*Lathyrus Sativus*), *Arahar* (*Cajanus cajan*), *Macur* (*Lens esculenta*), *But-māh* (*Cicer arietinum*), *Lecerā* (*Vigna sinensis*), *Urahī* (*Dolichos lablab*) etc. and oily seed crops like mustard, sesame, castor, purging nut and linseed. In the early part of the 19th century, Assam used to export 15,000 *maunds* of mustard

<sup>28</sup> Each of these varieties excepting the last one has numerous sub-varieties. Names of most of them appear in W. Robinson's *A Descriptive Account of Assam*, Reprint, Delhi, 1975, pp. 89f and W. W. Hunters, *A Statistical Account of Assam*, Second Impression, Vol. I, Delhi, 1975, pp.251ff.

<sup>29</sup> II, 5, 289-91.

<sup>30</sup> See also, B. K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Asam*, Nowgong, 1951, p. 85; M. Neog, *Purani Asamiyā Samājaru Sanskriti*, (Third Edition), Gauhati, 1970, p. 129.

<sup>31</sup> Bhuyan, *Studies in the History of Assam*, pp. 147f.

<sup>32</sup> The observation of the *Fāthiyā-i-Ibriyāh*, cited in Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 146 that these crops were not grown is not correct.

annually to Bengal.<sup>33</sup> There was cultivation of poppy too, but it was used as a drug and its consumption was confined to the kings and the nobles.<sup>34</sup>

### Vegetables :

Cultivation of various vegetables is mentioned in many works of the period. Pumpkin finds mention in earlier sources as well. Bāṇabhatta, for example, mentions among the presents of Bhāskara to Harsa pumpkin gourds containing painting materials.<sup>35</sup> The Bargāon grant of Ratnapāla (c. 1010-1040) refers to arable land with clusters of gourds.<sup>36</sup> The aphorisms of Dāk, the *Kumara Haraṇa*, the *Yoginī Tantra*, and other Assamese literary works of the period contain reference to different kinds of vegetables and spices and sometimes to their process of cooking also. Some of these like potatoes\*\* arum, brinjal, ginger, turmeric, bay-leaf, black-pepper, long pepper, onion, garlic, coriandam, cardamon, camphor, cloves, *Hing* (*Ferula assa-foetida*), *Jāfrāṅ* (saffron), *Jāiṇphal* (*Myristica fragrans*), *Jirā* (cumin) etc. find mention in Assamese chronicles. Qazim refers to the abundance of bay-leaf and pepper in the land.<sup>37</sup> Black pepper and long pepper formed important articles of

<sup>33</sup> B. Hamilton, *An Account of Assam*, second impression, Gauhati-1 1963, p. 46.

<sup>34</sup> G. R. Barua, *Asam Buranjī*, second impression, Gauhati, 1972, p. 120 ; M. R. Dewan, *Buranjī Vivek Ratna* (Ms.) Vol. II; 'Translation of a petition by Moneeram', appended to A. J. Moffatt Mills, *Report on the Province of Assam*, 1854, Appendix K. B.; S. K. Bhuyan, *Svargadev Rajesvar Singha*, Gauhati, 1975, pp. 262ff.; Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p. 59, however states that opium was raised in abundance for consumption and it was much used. But this view is not corroborated by the Assamese sources.

<sup>35</sup> Cowell, *Harsa Carita*, pp. 212f ; P. C. Choudhury, *History of the Civilization of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*, second edition, Gauhati, 1966, p. 335.

<sup>36</sup> Hoernle, *J. A. S. B.*, LXVII, I, pp. 89f ; Choudhury, *op. cit.*, p. 335 ; Barua, *op. cit.* p. 85.

\*\* Indigenous varieties of potatoes include *Mithā alu* (*Ipomoea batatas*), *Hātikhajā ālu* (*Dioscorea aculeata*), *Kāth ālu* (*D. alta*), and *Moā ālu* (*D. bulbifera*), The modern variety (*Solanum tuberosum*), our present staple vegetable was first brought for cultivation to Sillong by David Scott.

<sup>37</sup> *Asiatic Researches*, II, p. 173.

export from Assam to Bengal.<sup>38</sup> Of the leafy vegetables mentioned in different contemporary works, particular reference may be made of *Lafā* (*Malva verticillata*), *Pāleng* (*Spinacia oleracea*), *Cukā* (*Rumex vesicarius*), *Dhekia* (edible fern), *Bābari* and *Purai* (*Basella rubra*). Besides, the Assamese people are very fond of taking the young sprouting buds of bamboo and cane and the core of the plaintain tree. The *Jayantiya Burānji* mentions *kharicā* or *Gāj-teṅgā* (a kind of pickle made from bamboo bud) in the list of food-provisions made by the Ahom government to the diplomatic mission of the Jayantiya kingdom visiting Assam in the reign of Rudra Singha.<sup>39</sup>

### Horiticulture :

There are ample evidences to the cultivation of numerous fruit trees in Assam since very early times. The inscriptions of ancient Assam mention *Kaṇṭaphala*/*Kathāl* (jack fruit-*Artocarpus heterophyllus*), *Āmrā* *Āmbrāh* (mango/*Mangifera indica*) *Jambu*/*Jamu* (black plum-*Eugenia jambolana*), *Śrīphala*/*Bel* (wood-apple-*Aegle marmelos*), *Dumbari*/*Dimaru* (fig-*Ficus glomerata*), *Sākhoḷaka*, *Badari*/*Bagari* (*Zizyphus jujube*), *Amalaka*/*Āmlakhi* (*Embllica officinalis*), *Rudrākṣa* (bead tree-*Elacocarpus ganitrus*), and various kinds of citrus fruits. Yuan Chwang states that the people of Kāmarūpa cultivated jack fruit and coconut. The *Yoginī Tantra* enumerates different fruits in connection with the worship of the goddess and the *Śraddha* ceremony.<sup>40</sup> In the *Khathā-Guru Carita* and in the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Mādhav Kandali names of some other fruits like *Leteku* (*Baccaurea sapida*), *Mohari*/*Guamari* (*Foeniculum vulgare*), *Pañial* (*Flacourtia jangomas*), *Danḥāphal*, *Khiri*, etc. are mentioned. Shihabuddin Talish who accompanied Mir Jumlah in his invasion of Assam in 1662 A. D. made the following observation regarding Assam fruits : "The coconut and Nim trees are rare ; but pepper, spikenard and many species of lemon are abundant. Mangoes are full of worms, but plentiful, sweet and free from fibre, though yielding scanty juice. Its pineapple are very large, delicious to the taste and rich in juice. Sugarcane is of the black, read and white varieties and very sweet ; but so hard as to break one's teeth ; ginger is juicy....."<sup>41</sup> In the same strain Qazim wrote : "Assamese produces mangoes, plantains, jacks, citrous, limes, pineapples and *punialeh*, a species of *amleh*, which

<sup>38</sup> Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>39</sup> Ed. S. K. Bhuyan, second edition, Gauhati, 1964, pp. 98ff, 123.

<sup>40</sup> II, 7, 180-183, II, 5, 315-319.

<sup>41</sup> Cited in Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

has such excellence of flavour that every person, who tastes it prefers it to the plum".<sup>42</sup> Plantains, though numerous, were highly esteemed by the people and were used in all social and religious ceremonies. Literature of the period speaks of different varieties of plantain fruits. A particular mention of different uses of plantain tree is found in the account of Tavernier.<sup>43</sup> Preparation of a kind of alkali called *khār* or *khārani* from the plantain tree and its use as a substitute for salt have been referred to by Shihabuddin Talish.<sup>44</sup>

Assam soil is highly suitable for citrus fruit cultivation. Varieties of citrus fruits like lemon, orange, shaddock, olive, tamarind, *Outenga* (*Dillenia indica*), *Thekerā* (*Garcinia*) and *Kardai* (*Averrhoa carambola*) were cultivated by the people. One Muhammadan historian narrates that in Assam, "there were numerous orange trees, bearing a fine crop of very large and juicy oranges, which were sold in the Muhammadan camp at the rate of ten for a pice".<sup>45</sup> The list of the articles exported from Assam to Bengal in the early 19th century, as given by Hamilton, includes citrus fruits like *Thekera*, valued at rupees three per maund.<sup>46</sup>

Areca nut and betel vine are indispensable parts of Assamese cultural life. Their extensive use and cultivation are supported by epigraphic and literary sources of ancient and medieval periods. The use of three articles particularly by women is mentioned in the *Yoginī Tantra*. The introduction of the habit of chewing areca nut with betel vine is generally associated with the non-Aryans, particularly the Khasis, who have a special liking for it.<sup>47</sup> It is in Assam only, where unripe areca nut is chewed, which practice also attracted the notice of the author of the *Fāthiyā-i-Ibriyāh*.<sup>48</sup> The Assamese chronicles speak of both unripe and ripe areca nuts and two varieties of betel vine.<sup>49</sup> Other common palm trees are *Coā* (*Caryota urens*), *Takau* (*Corypha taliera*), and *Tāl* (*Borassus flabellifer*). Ornamented umbrellas made of bamboo and *takau* leaves formed important articles of trade.

<sup>42</sup> *Asiatic Researches*, II, p. 173.

<sup>43</sup> Tavernier's *Travels in India*, II, trans. V. Ball, 1925, p. 282.

<sup>44</sup> Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

<sup>45</sup> Cited in Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>46</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>47</sup> I, 6.

<sup>48</sup> Choudhury, *op. cit.*, p. 328.

<sup>49</sup> *loc. cit.* p. 150.

<sup>50</sup> *Jayantiya Buranjī*, (ed.) S. K. Bhuyan, second edition, Gauhati, 1964, pp.98ff, 123 ; *The Kāmarūpar Buranjī*, (ed.) S. K. Bhuyan, Gauhati, 1958, p.86 refers to another kind of betel vine called *Bilātī*.



Beautiful fans were made of *tāl* leaves. The trunk of the *Coā* plant was used for making javelins, beams, walking sticks and rafters of houses.

The Ahom government had an officer called *Bārī-coā-Baruā* to look after the royal garden. Momai Tamuli, the first incumbent to the office of the *Barbaruā* first came to the notice of king Pratāp Singha (1603-1641) through his beautiful garden.<sup>51</sup> The autor of *Fathiya-i-Ibriyah* refers to the "extremly elegant and fresh garden" of the Barphukan "round a very pure and sweet tank within the ground of his mansion".<sup>52</sup>

For making cloths, ropes, fishing nets etc. several kinds of fibre-yielding plants like cotton, rhea, jute, *Śimalu* (*Bombaxceiba*), *Son* (*Cretolaria juncea*), and *Tarā* (*Alpinia allughas*) were cultivated. A writing material called *Tulāpāt* was also prepared from cotton. Kamārkuchi, during the Ahom age, was famed for the best kind of cotton cloth woven with a kind of locally made thread called *nurākaṭā sutā*.<sup>53</sup> In Nowgong also, this special thread was made for weaving royal garments.<sup>54</sup>

Large number of medicinal plants are grown in Assam. Some of these like *Tulasī* (*Ocimum sanctum*), *Pādinā* (*Mentha spicata*), *Chalkuñwarī* (*Aloe vera*), *Bac* (*Acorus calamus*), *Ākan* (*Calotropis gigantea*), *Śatmul* (*Asparagus racemosus*), *Mahānim* (*Azadirachta indica*), *Sarpagandhā* (*Rauwolfia serpentina*), *Pātegajā* (*Bryophyllum pinnatum*), *Bhāng* (*Cannabis sativa*), *Mañichāl* (*Sapindus mukorossi* and *S. trifoliatius*) etc. were cultivated by the people in their homesteads.

The Assamese people took interest in flower plantation from very early times. This is evidenced mainly by the *Kālikā Purāna*, which while describing the objects dear to the goddesses Kāmākhyā and Tripurā, gives a long list of flowers. This list is however, reduced to more than forty in the literature of the medieval period. The *Yogīnī Tantra*, the *Hara Mohan* by Sri Sankaradeva, the *Lava Kuśar Yuddha* by Haribar Bipra and the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Mādhav Kandali supply us with the names of different beautiful and fragrant flowers.

<sup>51</sup> For details, see, B. Sarma, *Durbin*, Gauhati, 1961, pp. 1-18.

<sup>52</sup> *loc. cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>53</sup> Gohain, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 185f. During the Ahom age, the weaving of cotton cloth reached a high degree of perfection. See Saman, *Monograph on the Cotton Fabrics of Assam*, 1897. Cotton was largely available in the hill areas, which the hill people bartered for the products of the plains.

## Forest Products :

The most common trees in the forests of Assam are : *Vata/Bargach* (*Ficus bengalensis*) and *Asvattha/Āihat* (*Ficus religiosa*). *Candan* (*Santalum album*), *Devadāru* (*Polyalthia longifolia*), *Sarala* (*Pinus* sps.) and *Sāl* (*Shorea robusta*), are also grown. Other valuable timber trees are *Salakh* (*Terminalia myriocarpa*), *Mekai* (*Shorea assamica*), *Pamā* (*Cedrela toona*), *Khokan* (*Duabanga sonneratioides*), *Gamāri* (*Gmelina arborea*), *Tiiācopā* (*Michelia Champaca*), *Cam/Dewā* (*Artocarpus chaplasha*), *Hijal/Hidal* (*Barringtonia accutangula*), *Bancom* (*Phoebe attenuata* and *P. goalparensis*), *Amari* (*Amoora wallichii*), *Lālī* (*Dysoxylum procerum*) and *Gondhcarai* (*Cinnamomum glanduliferum*). Since the days of the *Mahābhārata* Assam is having her reputation as a land of agar wood (*Aquilaria agallocha*). The ancient authors like Kauṭilya, Kālidāsa and Bāṇabhaṭṭa as well as the inscriptions of early period make numerous references to this precious wood of Assam and extraction of oil and perfume from it. It was one of the main articles of trade between Assam and Mughal India. The first direct clash between the Assamese and the Mughals was over an affair of unauthorised collection of agar wood from Singri by a Mughal tradesman, Ratan Shah by name.<sup>55</sup> Manuscripts of the period and even of earlier times were written on barks called *Sāncipāt* prepared specially from the agar wood. The abundance of timber woods made possible the construction of numerous boats in ancient and medieval periods. The king's palace at Gargaon, so also the of the nobles and those who could afford it, were made of wood. Wood work reached its refinement during the days of the Ahoms, which is evidenced by the following statement of the chronicler of Mir Jumla's Assam campaign : "My pen fails to describe in detail the other arts and rare inventions employed in decorating the woodwork of the palace. Probably nowhere else in the whole world can wooden houses be built with such decoration and figure-carving as by the people of this country".<sup>56</sup>

An officer called Kāth-Baruā was in charge of the royal carpentry and another called Kāth-katiyā-Baruā looked after the forest timbers. The Chang-rung-Phukan was required to see the plantation of the trees particularly banyan on the road side.<sup>57</sup>

Bamboos and canes are also largely grown in the forests of Assam. They have many varieties. Bamboo is much used by the Assamese

<sup>55</sup> *Purani Asam Buranji*, (ed.) H. C. Goswami, Calcutta, p. 82.

<sup>56</sup> Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>57</sup> B. Handikai, *Journal of the Assam Research Society*, Vol. XIV. pp. 31f.

people in their day to day life. Houses, granaries, fences, bridges, weaving tools, baskets, containers, apparatus for fishing and hunting etc. are made of bamboos. It is therefore, held with reverence and it is forbidden to cut bamboos on inauspicious days. Beautiful furnitures are made of cane and bamboo.

Besides, some plants used for dyeing and tanning were cultivated by the people in their own gardens, whereas some were grown in the forests. This includes *Majāthi* (*Rubia cordifolia*), *Heṅgul* (*Balanites roxburghii*), *Śilikhā* (*Terminalia chebula*), *Nil* (*Indigofera tinctoria*), *Soṇāru* (*Cassia fistula*), *Kusum* (*Carthamus tinctorius*), *Golapi Jamu* (*Syzygium jambes*), *Jeṭukā* (*Lawsonia inermis*), *Keṅhrāj* (*Eclipta elba*), *Āsu-gach* (*Morinda tinctoria*), *Taruā-kadam* (*Acacia araciba*), *Kendu* (*Diospyros peregrina*), *Boromthuri* (*Talauma Hodgsoni*) etc. The manufacture of coloured cloths is mentioned by writers like Qazim.<sup>58</sup> Tavernier referring to the manufacture of lac in Assam writes that it "produces an abundance of shellac of a red colour—it is the best lac in the whole of Asia for these purposes".<sup>59</sup> Assam used to export 10,000 maunds of stick lac and a considerable quantity of *Majāthi* annually to Bengal.<sup>60</sup>

#### Sericulture :

Assam like China has a wide reputation in the manufacture of varieties of silk cloth. The art of sericulture was known to the Assamese as early as the days of the Epics. Kauṭilya, Bāṇabhaṭṭa and many ancient writers speak very highly of different varieties of Assam silk. Skill in the art of spinning and weaving has always been considered as the primary qualifications of an Assamese maiden. The fine quality of Assam silk attracted the attention of Persian chroniclers and foreign travellers. Qazim, for instance, writes that the silk of Assam was very excellent, resembling that of China<sup>61</sup>. Tavernier remarks that the silk of Assam was produced on trees and the stuffs made of them were very brilliant.<sup>62</sup> There are three main varieties of Assam silk worms : *Eri/Endi* (*Attacus ricini*), *Mugā* (*Antheroea*), and *Pāt* (*Patta*). *Eri* worms are mainly fed on castor plants (*Ricinus sps.*). In the medieval period and possibly in earlier days also, the Assamese people used to grow

<sup>58</sup> *Asiatic Researches*, II, pp. 173f. ; Choudhury, *op. cit.*, p. 343.

<sup>59</sup> Ball, *op. cit.*, pp. 281 f.

<sup>60</sup> Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>61</sup> *Asiatic Researches*, II, pp. 173f.

<sup>62</sup> Ball, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

these plants as hedges around their dwellings and fields. *Kasaru* (*Heteropanax fragrans*) *Baṅgāli Erā* (*Jatropha curcas*), *Gomāri*, *Bagari* *Brajanati*/*Bajarmuni* (*Zanthoxylum Budrunga*), and many other plants were cultivated for feeding these worms. For rearing the *Mugā* worms plants like *Ādākuri* (*Tetranthera quadrifolia*), *Sonālu* (*T. macrophylla*), *Dighulati* (*T. diglotti*), *Com* (*Machilus odoratissima*), *Campā* (*Michelia pulneyensis*), etc. were grown. The *Pāt* worms were fed on mulberry plants.

That agriculture was the most important means of livelihood can be clear from the following statement of the *Fāthiyā-i-Ibriyāh* : "If this country were administred like the Imperial dominions, it is very likely that forty to forty five lakhs of rupees would be collected from the revenue paid by the *Rāiyats*, the price of elephants caught in the jungles and other sources".<sup>63</sup> The same work gives us a picturesque description of the agricultural life of the middle of the seventeenth century in the following words : "From Kaliabar to Garhgaon houses and orchards full of fruit trees stretch in an unbroken line and on both sides of the road, shady bamboo groves raise their heads to the sky. Many varieties of sweet scented wild and garden flowers bloom here and from the rear of the bamboo groves upto the foot of the hills, there are cultivated hills and gardens. From Lakhugarh to Garhgaon, also, there are roads, houses and farms in the same style..... In this country, they make the surface of the fields and gardens so level that the eye can not find the least elevation in it upto the extreme horizon. Uttarkul has greater abundance of population and cultivation..... The trees of its hills and plains are exceedingly tall, thick and strong. Many kinds of odorous fruits and herbs of Bengal and Hindustan grow in Assam. We saw here certain varieties of flowers and fruits, both wild and cultivated, which are not to be met with elsewhere in the whole of India."<sup>64</sup> In the same strain, wrote the author of the *Ālamgīrnāmāh* that the country "presents on every side charming prospects of ploughed fields, harvests, gardens and grooves".<sup>65</sup>

#### Method of Cultivation :

The method of cultivation with hoes and ploughs was a very complicated process. The tribal people usually resorted to *jhumming* cultivation. There was terraced cultivation too, which is believed to have been introduced by the Angami Nagas from the Oceanic World

<sup>63</sup> Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 145f.

<sup>65</sup> Cited in Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

(Philippine Isles).<sup>66</sup> Both broadcast and transplantation methods were used in the cultivation of paddy. Most of the important towns, villages and arable lands were situated on the bank of the rivers. Reference to irrigation has been found as early as the date of Yuan Chwang's visit to Kamarupa who stated that "water led from the river or from banked-up lakes (reservoirs) flowed round the towns".<sup>67</sup> But the land being situated in the monsoon belt, there was generally no scarcity of rain and rice fields were irrigated only when necessary by drawing up water from the adjacent streams. The Kacharis, particularly of the *Duār* areas, were skilled in this technique.<sup>68</sup> Minhajuddin Siraj has referred to such irrigation works of opening up the waterdykes all around at the time of the spring harvest<sup>69</sup> in the kingdom of Kamarupa in the 13th century. Ralph Fitch who visited the Koch kingdom in the 16th century has made the same observation that the people could by damming the streams inundate the country above knee deep when necessary "so that men nor horses (could) pass."<sup>70</sup> These dams were thrown up across the upper courses of the hill streams and the stored-up water was drawn to the rice fields through a net work of channels. The poppy fields which require constant watering were irrigated by drawing water with a small wicker basket tied to the end of a small bamboo bundle, from reservoirs dug in the field for the purpose and leading the water to the fields through bamboo or cane pipes. The rice fields were divided into rectangular plots of about 20 by 30 feet by raising low ridges of mud and grass, so as to hold the right quantity of rain water. Excess water was used to be let out.

The country was, as it is today, much affected by flood. Embankments and spurs were therefore constructed at many places to guard against the inundation of particular rivers and streams. Chandibar, the great-great-grandfather of Sri Sankaradeva secured the blessings of the people while at Lenga-maguri, by constructing an embankment against the flooding of the Brahmaputra.<sup>71</sup> A considerable quantity of land in the vicinity of the large rivers was left untilld owing to its liability to inundation. The Ahom kings gave special attention to this problem of inundation and constructed innumerable spurs and embankments

<sup>66</sup> Choudhury, *op. cit.*, p. 334.

<sup>67</sup> S. Beal, *Travels of Hiouen-Tsang*, New edition, Calcutta, 1958 pp. 404.

<sup>68</sup> Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

<sup>69</sup> *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, pp. 762-66 ; K. L. Barua, *Early History of Kamarupa* (second edition) Gauhati, 1966, p. 151.

<sup>70</sup> Cited in Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 62 ; K. L. Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

<sup>71</sup> *Kathā-guru-Carita*, (ed.) U. Lekharu, 1964, pp. 14f.



particularly in the district of Sibsagar about the Brahmaputra, Dichang, Dikhow, Dihing and Darika rivers.<sup>72</sup> Robinson also observed that "nearly every stream in Upper Assam was anciently bunded".<sup>73</sup>

The soil being exceedingly fertile no manure was used for any of the major crops.<sup>74</sup> The overflowing rivers deposited a fresh top-dressing of silt every year which helped in luxuriant cultivation. As Robinson remarks: "The rapidity with which wastes composed entirely of sand, newly washed forward by river current during floods, become converted into rich pasture is astonishing".<sup>75</sup> In the kitchen gardens, the usual manure was cowdung. Ditches dug around the fields, hedges of *Erā gach* etc. and bamboo fencing served as a sort of enclosure in the fields. In spite of this, crops were often destroyed by animals.<sup>76</sup> There was extensive swamps and morasses in many parts of the state. In some places, however, they were drained and the area was brought under cultivation.

Plots of lands were set apart in the vicinity of the villages to be used as grazing fields for the animals. These fields were common to all the villagers and cowherds in rotation took charge of the grazing of the animals of the whole village. For the treatment of the diseases of men and animals, there were physicians called *Bej* or *Ojā*, maintained by the king by grants of land, attendants etc. Herbal medicines, chemicals, *tantra-mantras* ( charms and incantations ) were used for treatment.<sup>77</sup> Treatises on the treatment of diseases of elephants-*Hastividya-rṇava* and of horses-*Ghorā-Nidān*, are worth mentioning in this connection. In the Kock kingdom there were veterinary hospitals, which also provided asylums for all old and disabled animals.

The most important implements of agriculture were the plough, plough-beam, plough-share, bamboo harrow, clod breaker, rake, spade, axe, sickle etc. Cattle used in husbandry were oxen and buffaloes. Hamilton states: "In Kamrup oxen are the common labouring cattle; in Assam proper many buffaloes are employed in the plough. Sheep are scarce and goats are not numerous..... There are very few horses and no asses."<sup>78</sup> One pair of oxen could usually plough 10 to 12 *bighas* of land. Cost of some of the animals and birds are known from

<sup>72</sup> Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

<sup>73</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 222.

<sup>74</sup> G. R. Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

<sup>75</sup> *Descriptive Account of Assam*.

<sup>76</sup> *Khatā-guru-Carita*, pp. 33, 54-55, 470.

<sup>77</sup> Basu, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

<sup>78</sup> *op. cit.*, pp. 59f.

the epigraphic sources as well as from British records. In the 17th century, one goat cost Re 1/-, one duck one *anna* and one pair of pigeon half *anna* only. The price of horses, as they had to be imported from Bhutan, and Tibet, was very high, so that one of them cost rupees one hundred.<sup>79</sup> During the time of Captain Welsh's expedition to Assam, one buffalo cost Rs. 5/- and a cow Rs. 2/-.<sup>80</sup>

The value of the agricultural implements leaving aside the animals came up to roughly Rs. 3/- or Rs. 3/8 *annas* in the latter part of the 19th century. The cost was certainly less during the period of our survey.

Grain was stored in the granary both as threshed and unthreshed. Smaller quantities were kept in large bamboo baskets called *duli* or in corn-bins called *mer*. Seeds were preserved in a specially prepared bamboo casket called *tom* covered on all sides by straw and carefully sealed with a thick cover of areca nut sheath. Grain was unhusked with the *Dhenki*, which job was solely done by women.

#### Area of Cultivation : Out-put of Crops etc. :

Assamese sources provide no sufficient information regarding the exact area of lands under cultivation and out-turn of crops etc. Hamilton<sup>81</sup> observes that in Assam proper prior to the Moamariya Rebellions, 3/4 of the whole area were under cultivation which is also evidenced by some stray reference given by J. P. Wade, and by the fact that in the first decade of the 19th century even after the devastations caused by the Moamariyas, extent of waste and unoccupied land was not above 5/16. \*\* "It is said that of all lands in Assam proper which are occupied, 5/32 belong to the temples or men esteemed holy, 9/32 are let for rent and 9/16 are distributed among the *pāiks* or reserved for the king and his officers."<sup>82</sup> In Kamrup before the Moamoriya rebellions 5/8 of the total area were fully cultivated while the remaining 3/8 were waste lands being occupied by rivers, marshes, woods and hills.<sup>83</sup>

Regarding out-turn of crops, Hamilton while referring to the *pargaṇās* of Kāmrup, noted that a plough ( which Hunter equates with 4 acres of land ) produced annually 30 *viś* or about 80 *maunds* of

<sup>79</sup> *Kathā-guru-Carita*, p. 229.

<sup>80</sup> *Bengal Political Consultations*, May 28, 1794, No. 29.

<sup>81</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 26.

\*\* Hamilton presumed that this estimate would apply to the region on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra only.

<sup>82</sup> Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*, p. 36.

paddy and 6 *vis* or about 16 *maunds* of mustard seeds.<sup>84</sup> According to the *Statistical Report on Assam* by Hunter, one *bighā* of *rupit* land produced an average of 8 *maunds* of *Sāli* or *Lāhī* paddy and one *bighā* of *Phariṅgati* land about 6 *maunds* of *Āhu* paddy. When mustard seeds were growing on *Phariṅgati* land in addition to rice crops, it yielded 5 *maunds* per *bighā*. This estimate may be applicable to medieval Assam also.

### Classification of Land :

Epigraphic sources of the Ahom age throw much light on different classifications of land. There are mention of *rupit*, *ropit* or *rowatī* (moist rice land), *phariṅgati* (dry rice land), *kaṭhiyātali* (land for raising seedlings), *bāotali* (land of raising *bāo* paddy), *beṅgenātali* (land for *rabi* crops), *bārī* or *bhiṭhi* (homestead land), *habi* (forest land), *dalani* (marshy land with a kind of water grass known as *dal*), *bākari* (open waste land), *bil* (big natural pool), etc. Some other classifications like *aja-jaṅgalā*, *hāchilā-jaṅgala*, *minnik* (?), *swaminnik*, *bihi-jami*, *lāl*, *nil* etc. are not yet definitely identified.<sup>85</sup>

### Labour :

There was no system of hired labour in Assam in the Ahom age. As Hamilton observes : "Every man, who has a farm must in general, work it himself, for labourers..... can not be procured either for a share of the crop or for money".<sup>86</sup> The *pāik* system greatly helped in the growth of a community feeling which had its impact in agricultural life too. Plantation and harvesting were usually performed on a collective basis so that no tenant had his cultivation suffered from the shortage of labour. The nobles of course, had a number of slaves and retainers in their possession, whom they employed in cultivating and harvesting their crops.<sup>87</sup> The masters were very kind to their slaves and there was little difference between them and freemen. In the Koch kingdom, in the 16th century, however, there was a system of

<sup>84</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 36

<sup>85</sup> M. Neog, *Prāchya Śāsanavalī*, p. 135.

<sup>86</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 64.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid* ; M. Neog, *Sankaradeva and his Times*, 1965, p. 77; Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 265 ; G. R. Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 210 ; P. N. Gohain Barua, *Asamar Buranjī*, Tezpur, 1923, p. 127 ; S. L. Baruah, 'Slavery in Assam', *Journal of Historical Research*, Dibrugarh University, 1977 p. 78.

bondsmanship and rich people "could ask insolvent borrowers to repay their debts through such services" as tilling of the soil. <sup>88</sup>

At every stage of cultivation, except ploughing, women took very active part.

The *pāik* or tenant was a cultivator in times of peace and a soldier in times of war. As each of them was endowed with his legal share of two *purās* of cultivable land free of rent, there was no landless tenant in Assam in the Ahom age. People did not suffer from the shortage of food-stuffs except under rare occasions of natural calamities and beggardom was an unusual feature.

During the Ahom period more emphasis was laid on intensive cultivation, as they wanted to store sufficient quantity of food-grains for times of war. The rayots grew nearly every article of domestic consumption in their own fields and lived in ease, comfort and simplicity. Society being feudal in character, money having little circulation and payment of every thing being usually made in kind, general people did not think of large scale production.

Revenue set up in Kamrup being somewhat different from upper Assam, the condition of the tenants not covered by the *pāik* system was also different. Information in this regard is very scanty. Hamilton<sup>89</sup> observes that in the early part of the 19th century, each tenant in Kamrup paid Rs. 2/- as plough tax and half rupee as hoe tax to the king. But as there were a number of intermediaries between the Choudhury and the *Gāonkātīs*, the lowest officer associated with revenue administration, the tenants were required to pay three times or more of this amount either in cash or in kind and in case of their refusal or inability to do so, they were much oppressed. Many of them, therefore, left to the Company's territories for good during the period of disturbances arising out of the Moamariya rebellions towards the close of the 18th century, while some amongst them who had their lands close to the boundary line between Assam and the Company's possessions, used to cross the border ( the river Mānāha ) each morning, cultivate their fields and return again at night. If a tenant in Kamrup wanted to export mustard seeds to Bengal, he had to pay five baskets of rice to the Cakial Barua (custom officer) for obtaining the permission.

#### Markets :

To supply the people with the commodities they did not produce and to facilitate their commercial activities as well as to promote

<sup>88</sup> M. Neog, *op. cit.*, p. 77 :

<sup>89</sup> *op. cit.*, pp. 35f.

commercial transactions between the hills and the plains, the Assam kings founded a large number of markets in different places of the country like Dihing, Bakatā, Śadiyā, Kachārihāt, Titābar, Nāmchāng, Barhāt, Rahā, Gobhā, Sonāpur etc. Assam's trade with Bhutan created an important market at Geegunshur at a distance of four miles from Chouna, situated at the confines of Assam and Bhutan.<sup>90</sup>

The main agricultural product, which the Assamese traders used to carry for sale to the markets haunted by the hill people, was rice. The chronicler of Mir Jumlah's Assam expedition has observed that the only traders, who used to sit in the bazar beside a narrow road in the Ahom metropolis were the betel-leaf sellers, as it was "not their (people of Assam) practice to buy and sell articles of food in the market place".<sup>91</sup> But the statement is not wholly true for all local markets in the state. Names of markets like 'Sariah-hāt' (mustard-seeds market), 'Tāmūl-hāt' (areca-nut market) etc. indicate that in those markets, the commodity after which they were named was either the only or the main article for sale. Regulation of local markets by king Pratap Singha leads us to conclude that rice, mustard seeds, pulses etc. were bought and sold there. This is further evidenced by two copper-plate inscriptions of 1661 Śaka (1738 A. D.), showing that besides rice, milk, ghee, oil, pulse, salt, black-pepper, areca-nut, betel-leaf etc. were also bought and sold.<sup>92</sup> The *Kathā-guru-Carita* informs us that many sellers including women with loads of various commodities on their heads used to come to the market place at Nazirahat.<sup>93</sup> near the capital city. The same work refers to the sale of pulses, vegetables, fruits, mustard-oil, malasses and fire-wood.<sup>94</sup> Some villagers used to exchange bamboo-made articles like baskets, containers, sieves, winnowing fans and fishing tools for rice, salt, oil, etc.<sup>95</sup> It can therefore be assumed that to put the invaders in a state of discomfiture, sale of all commodities, except areca-nut and betel-leaf was suspended in the local markets in and around the capital city.

#### Price of Commodities :

Sources of information regarding the price of commodities during the Ahom rule are very scanty. The following tables, however, furnish

<sup>90</sup> Perberton, *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, Gauhati. 1966, p. 182.

<sup>91</sup> Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>92</sup> Gohain, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

<sup>93</sup> p. 318.

<sup>94</sup> *Kathā-Guru-Carita*, pp. 72, 76, 81, 104, 156.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, p. 420.



us with the price of some agricultural products in the first half of the 18th century as found in a Copper-plate inscription of Śaka 1661 (1739 A. D.).<sup>96</sup>

Commodities	Unit	Price ( Rs. )
Rice	Maund	00.14 approx.
Milk	"	00.16 "
Grain	"	00.25 "
Salt and oil	"	00.30 "
Gur	"	00.08 "
Black pepper	"	20.00 "
Betel-leaf	Bundle containing 20 leaves	00.06 per 40 bundles
Kalāsīs (Earthen pots)	piece	1.00 per 643 pieces.
Areca nut	piece	1.00 per 5120 pieces.

In other records<sup>97</sup> of the same period, prices of some of these commodities are reported as follows :

Commodities	Unit	Price ( Rs. )
Rice	Maund	00.25 to 00.50
Black gram	"	00.31
Pulse and Ghee	"	00.62
Oil	"	00.32 approx.
Salt	"	00.47 "
Betel-leaf	Bundle of 20 leaves	00.06 per 20 bundles.
Goat	Each	1.00
Duck	"	00.06
Pigeon	Pair	00.03
Dhuti	Piece	00.31
Gāmochā	"	00.10

The erratic fluctuations of price in the records of the same period might be due to the difference in the freight charges, which markedly varied from place to place depending on the distance and difficulties of transport. Almost all goods were relatively cheaper in eastern Assam. Higher cost of living in western Assam was mainly due to the repeated invasions of the Muhammadans, from the early part of the 13th century till the

<sup>96</sup> Gohain, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

<sup>97</sup> Gohain, *op. cit.*, p. 166 ; *Prāchya-Śāsanāvalī*, pp. 177ff, 184.

battle of Itakhuli in 1681 A. D., Political instability arising out of these prolonged contests hindered agricultural operations. Moreover, ravages perpetrated by the Bhutanese particularly on the inhabitants at the foot of their hills often brought in shortage of food-stuffs which intensified the increase of prices.

From the list of exports from Assam to Bengal as given by Hamilton, it is learnt, that even in the decadent kingdom of Assam in the beginning of the 19th century, black-pepper and long pepper cost Rs. 10/-, raw cotton Rs. 5/-, mustard seeds Re 1.33 (approx.), *Thekerā* (Thaikal) Rs. 3/-, *Mugā* silk Rs. 174.61 (approx.) and *Mugā* cloth Rs. 233.33 (approx.), all per maund.<sup>98</sup> The cost was definitely much low before the Moamariya insurrection.

The *Tunkhūṅiā Buranjī* informs us that the price of all eatables went up to an unprecedented level during the days of famine resulting out of the Moamariya rebellions, so that one lime-pot of rice (about 250 gms.) cost Re 1/-, one mango Re 1/- and one bundle of arum Re 1/- or Re. 1.50.<sup>99</sup> But this seems to be an inflated reporting of prices designed to exaggerate the havoc created by the Moamariyas, as arum so abundantly grown everywhere in Assam could never have been sold at so high a rate.

Rules regulating the sale of commodities in the markets were framed and implemented for the first time by king Pratap Singha.<sup>100</sup> Each market was placed under the control of an officer like Phukan and Barua etc. The markets at the frontiers were generally placed under the control of the Cakial Barua. Under them were a class of junior officers called *Hātkhōās* (marketing officers), who received a tax called *Hātkar* from each seller amounting to 1/20 of his goods brought for sale.<sup>101</sup> The flat rate of *hātkar* imposed by Pratap Singha was abolished by Rajeswar Singha who fixed different rates of *hātkar* depending on the value of the goods sold.<sup>102</sup>

After the expedition of Captain Welsh to Assam in 1792-94, some Marwari and Bengali marchants came and opened their shops in different parts of the state. Following them, some Assamese individuals also started their shops. During the time of Chandrakanta Singha (1810—1818), there were only three shops at Jorhat, the newly

<sup>98</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>99</sup> ed. S.K. Bhuyan, Gauhati, 1964, p. 11.

<sup>100</sup> Tamuli Phukan, *op. cit.*, p. 138 ; B. Sarma, *op. cit.*, p. 4 ;  
*Sātsarī Asam Burāñji*, p. 29.

<sup>101</sup> *Sātsarī Asam Burāñji*, p. 29.

<sup>102</sup> *Deodhai Asam Burāñji*, p. 142

founded capital city of the Ahoms, two of which belonged to Assamese businessmen.<sup>103</sup> Gunabhi Ram Barua observes that "some Muslim women had shops in their own residence".<sup>104</sup>

### Natural Calamities : Effects on Agricultural life.

Flood, the most devastating natural calamity in present Assam, does not find frequent mention in the Assamese chronicles probably due to the reason that they were not serious enough to affect the general prosperity of the country. The *Kathāguru-Carita*, however, narrates the plight of the people owing to the inundation of the Brahmaputra and streams like the Tembua.<sup>105</sup> Draught was an exception. It was in the year 1665 A.D. only that there was an exceptionally severe draught, "the only occasion recorded in the whole course of the Assamese history, when the rains failed to an extent sufficient to cause a complete failure of crops".<sup>106</sup> Appearance of locusts also was, sometimes, so wide-spread and havocing that it led to the occurrence of famines. Epidemic amongst the cattle at times became a matter of concern to the peasants and so also diseases of the food-crops and other plants. With these may be added, the occasional raids of the neighbouring hill people, who used to take away the crops, cattle and even human beings from the dwellings in the fertile regions at the foot of their hills. The repeated insurrections of the Moamariyas resulted in the occurrence of a famine in 1789 in the reign of Gaurinath Singha, when food-stuffs became so scarce and fate of the people so perilous that many abandoned their own children.<sup>107</sup> The country between Dergaon and Rongpur, once so highly cultivated, was found desolate by Captain Welsh and many large villages had been entirely deserted by their inhabitants".<sup>108</sup> But these were abnormal times. Normally, agricultural operations continued with regularity year after year and people enjoyed fair degree of self-sufficiency.

### Conclusion :

Assam in the main was a peasants' land par excellence. Not only the economy of the country but also her social and cultural

<sup>103</sup> G. R. Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> pp. 14f, 48f, 337.

<sup>106</sup> Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

<sup>107</sup> *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 11,

<sup>108</sup> Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

patterns were to a large extent determined by agricultural pursuits in rural surroundings.<sup>109</sup> Names of villages like Tāmulbārī, Sariyahtali, Mahbandhā, Padumaṇi, Śimaluguri, Ānhāt-guri, Pālaśbārī, Cāulkhoā, Nāharaṇi, Ouguri etc. are suggestive of importance of agricultural operations in the life of the people. Blessed with a land of extreme fertility, and simplicity being the key-note in the patterns of life, Assamese peasants in the days of the Ahoms lived in amity, ease and comfort under an administrative set up, which tried to promote social cohesiveness and unity.

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<sup>109</sup> Basu, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

## A HOARD OF METALLIC IMAGES FROM HAHARA, KAMRUP

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Hahara, a small village near Sonapur, Kamrup, is not noted for archaeological heritage, although the region as a whole can take pride in a number of important archaeological sites and remains. It was here that the metallic images in question, numbering altogether 15, were accidentally found in the course of digging a tank by one Tobin Basumatari some time in the month of March of the current year (1978). The images were subsequently acquired with the help of the Govt. and brought over to the Assam State Museum. Next to the Odalbakra hoard, found some years back, this is the largest haul of such images made recently.

Stylistically, the images can be divided into two groups—early and late,—the early group covering 10th and 11th centuries i. e. the Pala style of the Eastern region and the late group covering a time span ranging from 15th/16th to the 18th century A. D.

Given below is a brief description of the iconographical features of the images and their probable historical background.

### Group A or Early group

1. Composite twin *Devī* images (9 cm). Of this composition, the left one sits in *Lalitāsana* with a child on her lap, or rather on her left thigh to be precise, and the right hand resting on the right knee in *Varadā* pose. The image on the right hand side is in *padmāsana* in *Dhyāna mudrā*. Both the images are two-armed. The *Prabhāvalī* has two circles right behind the two images flanking a *Kalpa-vrkṣa*. The pedestal has three small images at three of its corners—a bull (?) at the back left corner, a devotee with its torso and head missing, at the front left corner, and a male devotee in *añjali* pose at the front right corner. The back of the *Prabhāvalī* has a few as yet undeciphered letters.

The identity of the two images cannot be determined with certainty. If the two images were to be identified as parts of a



*Saptamātṛkā* complex ( *Mātṛkā* images are occasionally found in groups of twos and threes ), then, judging by the presence of the bull at the back left corner, the image on the left, holding a child, could well be *Māheśvarī*, while the other one could be any one of the remaining *Mātṛkās*. If, on the other hand, the image on the left is identified as *Hārītī*, the accompanying image still remains unidentified.

2. *Hārītī* ( 6·5 cm. )—The *Devī* sits in *Lalitāsana* on a five-tiered 'padma' seat, is two-armed and holds a child on her left thigh, while in her right hand, which rests on her right knee in *varadā* pose, she holds an indistinct object. The image is fully decorated with a *karaṇḍa-mukuta* and other usual jewellery. The modelling is of perfect hand, with firm breasts and slim waist, and idiomatically similar to the one above. The aureole behind is decorated with floral motifs.

This is another fine specimen of the metallic sculptures of the mediaeval period.

3. *Garuḍa* ( 5 cm. )—This is an anthropomorphic figure of *Garuḍa*, shown in a kneeling position with his right knee resting on the ground. Its two hands are shown in *varadā* pose. Behind the two arms are shown the two short wings of the celestial bird. The hair-do is done at the back in a fan-like manner. The nose is aquiline.

The piece belongs to the mediaeval period.

4. *Devī* ( 6 cm. )—The *Devī* sits in *padmāsana*, is four-armed and holds in her upper right hand a lotus bud, a *Kartri* in her upper left hand while the two lower hands are in *abhaya* and *varadā* pose, respectively. The recumbent *vāhana* shown at the pedestal is either a stylized lion or a tiger. The nature of the image could not as yet be identified. Stylistically, the image falls in the same category as the above-mentioned *Hārītī*.

#### Group B or Late group

5. *Tripurā-Bhairavī* ( 7·5 cm. )—Seated in *Padmāsana* on a corpse with its head on *Devī's* left, and supported by a three-tiered pedestal, the image is four-armed and the two upper hands are in *varadā* pose, while the lower left hand has an *akṣamālā*. On her tiara is depicted the crescent moon. She wears a *muṇḍa-mālā* as garland. The radiating *Prabhāvalī* has a serpent hood immediately below the *kalasa* finial. The inner rim of the *Prabhāvalī* is decorated with beaded motif. According to the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, ( ch. 74, verses 93-98 and 104-106 ) the *Devī* has in her four hands either *abhaya-mudrā*, *Sraja* (*mālā*), *pustaka* and *varadā mudrā* or *pustaka*, *varadā-mudrā*, *abhaya-mudrā* and *akṣamālā*. In this

icon, the goddess has her two upper hands in *abhaya* pose, while the *varadā* pose is absent. And so is the *śraja*. The image, thus, can be said to be a near approximation to the details given in verses 104-106 of the *K. P.*

6. *Tripurā-Bhairavi* ( 5'5 cm. ) — Seated in *padmāsana* on a lotus supported by a corpse with its head on Devī's left, this four-armed three-eyed goddess has, like the previous one, a crescent on her tiara and a skull garland around her neck. Surrounding her and seated on the four corners are four females in *padmāsana* and *añjalī* mudrā. Unlike the previous image, it has no *prabhāvalī* but a central tenon issuing right from the goddess' back. In her four arms she holds, from upper right hand onwards ( clockwise ), *akṣa*, *pustaka*, *abhaya-mudrā* and *varadā-mudrā* with a spherical object on the palm. This description fully tallies with verses 105-106 of ch. 74 of the *Kālikā Purāṇa*.

7. *Gajalakṣmī* ( 6'5 cm. ) — Four-armed, seated in *padmāsana* and surrounded on four corners by four elephants, each holding a water jar in its trunk, and each perched on a high platform supported by two tall props (the front right elephant is, however, missing), the goddess holds, in her four hands, from the upper right hand onwards (clockwise), *Padma*, *Padma*, *abhaya-mudrā* and *varadā-mudrā*. The significance of the image lies in the fact that this is the first instance of a *Gajalakṣmī* of this type; and secondly, this is the only metallic *Gajalakṣmī* image so far found in this region. The goddess wears, among other things, a denticled tiara and belongs stylistically to c. 16th century A.D., if not later.

8. *Sūrya* (9 cm). This is an interesting image in that the deity, flanked by two male attendants holding a *Padma* each in the left hand, and with the right hand in a modified form of the *Varadā* pose, is seated on the pericarp of a lotus with a fairly tall stem issuing right out of the back of the central horse below that raises the god with his two attendants far above the seven horses. The charioteer holds the reins and is seated on the back of the central horse right behind the lotus stem. The god, as well as his two attendants, are seated in the *Padmāsana* pose, the former holding a lotus in each of his two hands. Behind the image is a semi-circular band and a central cross-bar running horizontally across, with a finial at the centre of the band right over the head of the central deity.

The composition is noteworthy in that this is the only *Sūrya* image of this type with a long lotus stem, raising the principal deity far above the level of the chariot.

9. *Mahiṣamardini* (8 cm)—Ten-armed, three-eyed and standing in the conventional *ālīḍha* pose with the left foot on the severed torso

of the buffalo and the right foot on the back of the stylized lion of typically late medieval vintage, the Devī is flanked by a four armed Gaṇeśa on Muṣika on her right and a mono-cephallic two armed Kārtikeya on peacock on her left. The *āyudhas* on the Devī's hand are from lower right hand upwards—*triśula*, *śakti*, *bāṇa*, *Cakra* and *Khaḍga*; and on her left hands in similar order—lock of the demon's hair, *Paraśu* (?), *aṅkuśa* (?), *dhanu* and *khetaka*. On her head, which is adorned with a late-period *makuta* instead of a *jaṭā*, is the crescent moon. The rim of the *Prabhāvatī*, which is partly broken, is adorned with spiral motifs. The tiara-ed demon stands with his legs flexed and the right knee on the ground, holding a *khaḍga* in his two hands, and with the lion biting his right elbow. The hooded serpent of the Devī coils round the Asura's neck with its hood reared in front of his face.

10. Mohiṣamardinī (5 cm)—Ten-armed and three-eyed, this image is stylistically similar to the one mentioned above, except that here Gaṇeśa, Kārtikeya and the aureole behind the Devī is absent and the demon does not sport a tiara. The *āyudhas* are, clockwise, from the lower right hand onwards—*triśula*, *śakti* (?), *bāṇa* (?), *cakra*, *khaḍga*, *khetaka*, *dhanu*, and indistinct object, and finally the tuft of the demon's hair.

Stylistically, it is coeval with the other Mahiṣamardinī image mentioned above.

11. Viṣṇu (9 cm)—Standing in *samapāda* on a therio-morphic Garuḍa bird in *añjalī* pose, and flanked by Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī standing in *samapāda* on *Padma* on either side, and holding respectively a *cāmara* and a *vinā*, Viṣṇu here represents his *Trivikrama* aspect holding, from the upper right hand onwards (clockwise), *gadā*, *cakra*, *śaṅka* and *Padma*. All the images are bejewelled. Of the three garlands of Viṣṇu, the two lower ends of the *Vyjayantīmālā* end up in curls. All the three images wear similar sharply denticled tiara with a central flower-bud-like projection. The eyes are wide open and slightly bulging.

The perforated *Prabhāvatī* is pointed, with a blooming flower topping a serpent-like decoration at the pointed end.

12. Viṣṇu (6m)—Four-armed and standing in *samapāda*, the image is similar in style and execution to the other Viṣṇu image mentioned above, the only notable difference being that while the aureole of the previous one is pointed and topped by a flower finial, with multifarious open-works on its body, the aureole of this image is rectangular, with chamfered corners and a *kalasa* finial instead of a flower finial, and the open works limited to two oblong and paralleled slits. Secondly, while the face of the early one is roundish, that of the latter is longish.

PLATE I



Fig. 1



Fig. 7

PLATE II

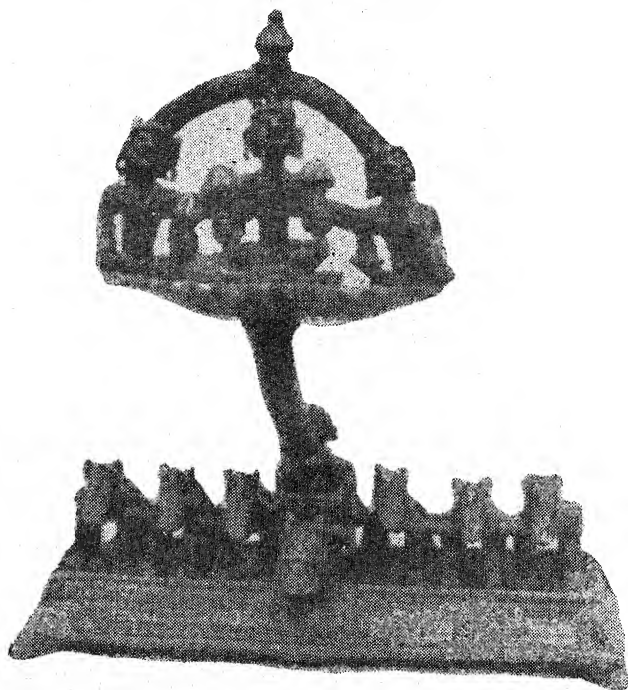


Fig. 8

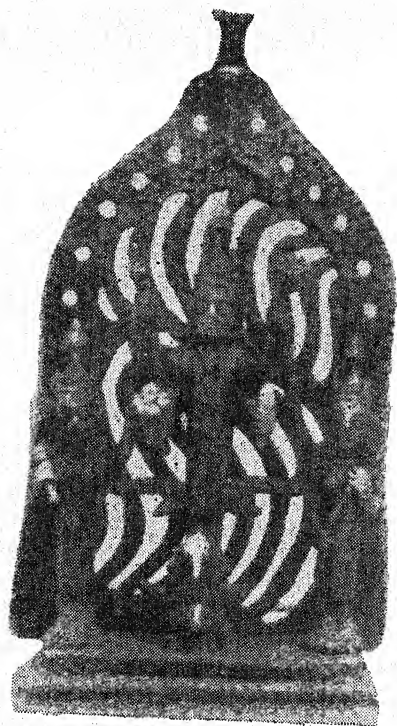


Fig. 11



And thirdly, the latter one stands on a *Padma*, and not on *Garuḍa*, the *Garuḍa* being depicted, interestingly, facing the deity in *añjalī* pose with its back to the viewer. Like the former one, this image also represents Viṣṇu in his *Trivikrama* aspect and belongs to the same period.

13. Gaṇeśa (4 cm)—Four-armed and seated in *rājalilāsana*, with the right foot resting on his *Muṣika Vāhana*, the god holds in his hands, from upper right hand onwards (clockwise),—*nīlotpala*, *paraśu*, *varadā-mudrā* and *varadā mudrā* with citrus in his palm and the proboscis resting on it. The temples of his head are abnormally bulging, over which, in the centre is depicted a crescent with a star or point. His body is coiled around by a serpent, its hood raised in front of his left shoulder.

14. Gaṇeśa (3.5 cm)—Seated in *rajalilāsana* with his right foot resting on his *Muṣika*, this four-armed image has its upper right hand broken at the elbow. The other three hands hold, from the upper left hand onwards (clockwise), *aṅkuśa*, *paraśu* and citrus. Like that of the previous one, the proboscis of this image is also turned to his right and rests on the palm of the lower right hand. The image has a denticled tiara without the *jaṭā*, the latter element being depicted in the previous Gaṇeśa. The image is ill-shaped, uncouth and much inferior to the previous one in style and execution.

15. Bird (3.5 cm)—The bird is a peacock standing solitary on a pedestal, with a garland-like decoration around the throat, and the feathers and the fins depicted by means of incision. Its beak is curved, the eyes somewhat bulging, and the crest fully depicted. The bird might have been a part of a Kārtikeya image. But there are no signs to confirm this, as no evidence of its being a part of a larger complex exists. It seems to be a free-standing example.

These two groups are distinguished from each other by (a) the mode of holding the *āyudhas*. While in the Early Group the images hold their *āyudhas* in *Khaṭakāmukha mudrā*, in the latter group the *āyudhas* are simply held in the grip, as witnessed in the sculptures of the Ahom Age. (b) The treatment of the tiara differs in both the groups. In the Early Group, the *mukuṭa* is a short square affair with short denticles, while that of the latter group is decorated with long denticles with a rather tall central projection. (c) The modelling of the body differs. In the Early group the physique is slim and graceful, that of the latter is somewhat angular and rigid. (d) No '*bhaṅgas*' or flexions of the body is to be noticed in the late group, which is a marked feature in the Early Group. (e) Lastly, the eyes of the image of the late Group are wide open and slightly bulging, which is not the case with those of the Early group.

## INDIAN POETRY THROUGH AGES\*

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It is indeed a very bold venture that I am going to discuss here Indian Poetry through ages, which is undoubtedly a vast subject, covering a long span of time beginning approximately round about the middle of the second millennium B. C. It is, therefore, practically impossible to go into details and do justice to the subject in one paper. Even then, it is not impossible to trace the line of development, showing the salient traits of each period and the working forces behind the changes that carried forward the long process of evolution and the general characteristics that manifested in the Indian poetry from time to time. It may be said in this connection that the Indian poetry till the advent of the British and the consequent impact of the European literature, could not be divorced from religion and a sharp differentiating line could not be drawn between the so-called religious and secular poetry. Emphasis on religious elements or secular elements makes all the difference. For instance, the *Raghuvamśa* or *Kumāra-sambhava* of Kālidāsa apparently appears as a piece of secular poetry, but the tone of these two Kāvya is deeply religious. As a matter of fact, the Indians began to see the activities of this mundane life, as divorced from religious beliefs, in the secular perspective since the beginning of the nineteenth century of the Christian era when the window to the Western ideas and literature was opened through the establishment of the British rule in India. Therefore, the whole gamut of Indian literature, till the impact of the Western ideas and thought, was coloured by Indian religious beliefs, philosophical speculations and religious ethos.

The next important consideration in tracing the development of the Indian poetry is the social *milieu* which is mainly responsible for changing the tone, pattern and norm of literature from time to time. Literature, being the mirror of contemporary society, reflects directly

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\* This is the summary of Kamal Memorial lecture delivered under the auspices of Manipuri Sahitya Parishad on May 13, 1979.

or indirectly the hopes and aspirations, ideas and thoughts, beliefs and superstitions, tastes and aversions and joys and sorrows of the people whom it is supposed to represent. The Indian literature, representing the different phases of its history, unfolds the panorama of Indian life through successive projections of its life and society in the forms of drama, poetry and story. From the Indian poetry, therefore, one might reconstruct the Indian society and modes of human feelings and thoughts through the progressive march of history.

Having said the above as a prelude to my discussion I would now pass on to deal with the earliest manifestation of the Indian poetry, viz., the poetry of the Vedic period of which the hymns of the *Rigveda* deserve our consideration. The Vedic society was essentially a pastoral one with simple habits and beliefs. The gods of the *Rigveda* are almost entirely personification of natural phenomena, such as the Sun, Dawn, Fire and Wind etc., addressed at the time ; their key-note is throughout a simple outpouring of the heart, a prayer to a particular god to grant long life and prosperity by removing all obstacles of life. To quote Kaegi. "There is in them all a fresh breath of vigorous primeval poetry. Whoever takes the trouble to transfer himself to the religious and moral thought and action, the poetry and the working of a people and the age in which the first spiritual development of our own race is placed before our eyes at its best, will feel himself attracted in various ways by many of these hymns, here through the childlike simplicity, there through the freshness or delicacy of feeling and in others by the boldness of metaphor, by the flight of imagination."<sup>1</sup> The hymns are unsophisticated and spontaneous expression of the sense of admiration, gratefulness and solicitation of the seer-poets for the personified deities whose greatness, prowess, strength and beauty are eulogised in metaphorical terms. Thus Indra is described as big and strong in his arms. With beautiful lips he quaffs the Soma drink and when he is drunk he moves his jaw-bones with pleasure and shakes his fair beard. Fair as gold is his hair and complexion. He is giant in stature—heaven and earth would not be large enough to serve him as his girdle. In this way, the seer-poet goes on describing the enormous power and strength of Indra in 250 hymns. The rugged simplicity and strength of these verses bespeak of the imaginative genius of the earliest poets of the world.

Of all the hymns, those addressed to the goddess of dawn (*usar*) are splendid examples of graceful creating the charm of which is unsurpassed in religious lyrics of any other literature. "Gleaming

<sup>1</sup> M. Winternitz, *Hisiory of Indian Literature*, Vol. I pp. 72-73.

she approaches like a maiden bedecked by her mother, who is proud of her body to the mortal. Clothed in light the maiden appears in the east and unveils her charms. She opens the gates of heaven and, radiant steps forth out of them.”<sup>2</sup>

A few hymns, more secular than religious, such as the ‘Frog Song’ (Rv. VII. 103) or the ‘Gambler’s Song’ (Rv. x 34) breathe an air of familiarity and homeliness. It may be noted here that the belief in the transmigration of soul and repeated rebirth—the belief which controls the whole philosophical thought of the Indians in later centuries—is singularly absent in the hymns of the *Rigveda*. The hymns are marked by optimism and firm faith in life. The seer-poets have demonstrated their ability in conjuring up the desired image of the deity by skilful use of imageries and metaphors.

We now pass on to the classical period of Sanskrit literature which roughly starts a couple of centuries before Christ. The Vedic society was more or less a tribal one. The big kingdoms and cities and towns did not emerge yet. By the time the classical period in Sanskrit literature started, the political, social and religious condition in India underwent great changes. Big empires like those of the Mauryas, Sungas, Kānvas and Nandas were established; Buddhism & Jainism became two prominent religious faiths in India alongside Brahminism. The primitive pastoral life was gradually replaced by the more advanced agricultural life, supplemented by trade and commerce and the caste-hierarchy got itself firmly established. The Vedic language was replaced by the classical Sanskrit which assumed the role of the literary language throughout Aryanised India. Although the Theravāda school of Buddhism preferred the Pāli language, it did not go beyond their religious sphere. So, when the classical period of Sanskrit literature commenced in the early centuries of the first millennium B.C., India had undergone many changes in the political, religious and social spheres and the impact of these changes could be noticed in various types of literature.

The poetry of the classical period of Sanskrit is not only extensive but also varied in content and style. Leaving the vast religious literature written in verse-forms with occasional flashes of brilliant poetry out of our consideration, the secular or pure poetry alone covers a wide range of forms, style and contents. We have the genuine epics or the epics of growth in the shape of the two national epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* where the poetry, religion, politics, philosophy and ethics are blended with a view to projecting a complete image of ancient India.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 91

While the *Mahābhārata* presents an encyclopaedic view of India, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, on the whole, in spite of many deviations in the first and last canto from the central theme, gives the impression of a cohesive unified work. Both the epics are cast in the heroic mould and probably represent expanded and remodelled versions of the heroic ballads of an earlier heroic age. Dr. M. Winternitz characterises the *Mahābhārata* as a literary monster, but at the same time he remarks : "Out of the unshapely mass shine out the most precious blossoms of immortal poetic art and profound wisdom. The very fact that the *Mahābhārata* represents a whole literature rather than one single and unified work and contains so many and so multifarious things, makes it more suited than any other book to afford us an insight into the deepest depth of the soul of the Indian people."<sup>3</sup> As regards the *Rāmāyaṇa*, it is generally held to be the precursor of the later ornate epics or the court epics, and Vālmiki has remained a pattern to which all later Indian poets admiringly aspired. In short, it is a popular epic and ornate poetry at the same time.

It has already been mentioned that the classical Sanskrit poetry originated and developed in an urban and sophisticated atmosphere of cities and royal courts where *nāgarakas*, i.e. the polished men about the town largely moulded the tenor of literature and poetry. The science of Erotics, especially that of Vātsyāyana, exercised a profound influence on the theory and practice of the poetry of this period. The Sanskrit poet of love was expected to show his skill and knowledge of the *Kūmasūtra* by his minute and highly flavoured description. As a result, many a description of the Sanskrit love poetry is conventional and highly erotic, sometimes bordering on pornography. Another note-worthy feature is that the ancient Indian ideal of the excellence of poetry is closely linked up with the conception of *rasa* or aesthetic enjoyment, the suggestion of which is taken to be its function. But here the Indian aestheticians are emphatic that in the art of suggesting this aesthetic enjoyment in the readers' mind the poetic imagination must play a conspicuous part. In such a sophisticated atmosphere it is no wonder that the poetry would be refined and rich and highly established with startling expressions, fanciful imageries and metaphors and ornate style, sometimes, sacrificing ease and spontaity. Keeping within the bounds of prescriptions of the rhetoricians and some times transgressing them, the gifted poets like Kālidāsa and Bhavabhūti could conjure up a world of beauty which lifts the readers to the highest state of aesthetic bliss. The Sanskrit poets have made wonderful use of the sheer beauty of words and their

<sup>3</sup> *History of Indian Literature*, Vol-I, pp. 326-27



inherent melody and assonance of which Sanskrit is so capable. The various forms of metaphors and similes are a source of great delight by their power of happy phraseology and richness of poetical fancy.

A work of art is also an expression of personality, but unfortunately the Sanskrit poetry, as stated by Dr. Sushil Kumar De, is lacking in that personal quality, that expression of the poetic mind in contact with which our minds may be moved. The Sanskrit poetry is made to conform to certain fixed external standard attainable by scholarship, culture and practice.<sup>4</sup> A real poet like Kālidāsa, however, chalks out his own path instead of treading on a oft-trodden path.

The Sanskrit poet is undoubtedly pessimistic in his belief in the inexorable Law of Karma and rebirth. Probably this belief was inherited from the Buddhistic tradition, but it is toned down by unlimited optimism with regard to the next world. It fosters the spirit of resignation and a mystic hope and faith.

Lastly, a few words about the treatment of nature may be said here. The Sanskrit poets noticed the deep communion between man and nature. Many of the poets have masterfully painted the varied moods of nature and graphically portrayed various seasonal beauties in tune with the human mind.

Having discussed the general characteristics of the classical Sanskrit poetry let us now discuss the different types of the Sanskrit poetry in a nut-shell to have a rough idea of the vast expanse and varied manifestations of the poetic revelations. The most elaborated type of poetry, generally known as *mahākāvya*, was cultivated by a long line of poets who were very often associated with the royal courts. These literary epics or court epics, as opposed to the genuine epics, started with Aśvaghōṣa's *Buddha-carita* and *Saundarānanda* in the first century A. D. and continued roughly to the twelfth century A. D., when the great *Naiṣadhacarita* of Śrīharsa was composed. Stray attempts to write *mahākāvya* were made even after the Muslim conquest of India, but they are not notable productions worthy of drawing our attention.

The Sanskrit poetics defines *mahākāvya* as having more than eight cantos describing glories and exploits of great kings or noble persons in lofty style, interspersed with scenic beauty and change of fortune. The earliest works of this genre, viz. *Buddha-carita* and *Saundarānanda*, was composed by Aśvaghosa, a contemporary of king Kaniṣka, in the first century A.D. ; the poet belonged to the Mahāyāna school of Buddhism. The first work, describing the life of the Buddha,

<sup>4</sup> Dasgupta & Dey : *History of Sanskrit Literature*. p. 486

consists of 28 cantos of which only 12 are now available. The second deals with love of Sundari and Nanda in 18 cantos, who afterwards found solace in Buddhism. Aśvaghoṣa's works more or less served as models to Kālidāsa whose crowning achievements in this genre of Kāvya are enshrined in his two monumental works. *Raghuvamśa* and *Kumārasambhava*. Kālidāsa was followed by a galaxy of epic-poets, viz. Bhāravi, (7th century) Māgha (9th century), Śrīharsa (12th century) who respectively composed *Kirātārjunīyam*, *Śiśupālavadham* and *Naiṣadha-caritam*. These three with the two of Kālidāsa constitute *Pañca-mahākāvya* in Sanskrit Literature. Some more *mahākāvya*s were written by minor poets, which, however, did not receive approbation from discerning critics.

The next important category of poetry is episodical *Kāvya*s having intensively lyrical vein in the treatment of themes and description. Kalidasa's *Meghadūta* is one of such works which has given unmixed pleasure to thousands of readers for the last fifteen hundred years or even more. Here the unbearable anguish of a separated husband from his newly wedded beautiful wife on the onset of the rainy season is feelingly and tellingly described. The veil of separation between man and nature, between animate and inanimate objects is obliterated here. After *Meghadūta*, a long list of imitative works like *Hamśa-dūta*, *Payana-dūta*, *Bhramara-dūta* etc., is found, but they are dull and imitative productions with occasional flashes of brilliant description interspersed here and there.

One important branch of the lyrical poetry consists of that miniature painting which depicts an amatory situation or sentiment in a single stanza of four lines. These stanzas are generally clustered in terms of hundred or centuries and that is why such collections are called *Śatakas* or centuries. The earliest collection of centuries of poetical stanzas is Hala's *Gāhā Satsai* (*Gāthā Saptatī*) in the Prakrit language. Each poetical stanzas standing by itself depicts a single phase of emotion or a single situation within the limits of a finely finished form. Appreciating the poetic beauty of such *śatakas* Macdonell writes : "Bearing the evidence of great wealth of observation and depth of feeling, they are often drawn by a master-hand. Many of them are in matter and form gems of perfect beauty."<sup>5</sup> Of all the *Śatakas*, those of Amaru, Bhartrihari, Bilhana, are most famous. Amaru describes "With great delicacy of feeling and gracefulness of imagery, the infinite moods and fancies of love, its changes

<sup>5</sup> A. A. Macdonell : *History of Sanskrit Lit.* p. 432

and chances, its strange vagaries and wanton wiles, its unexpected thoughts and unknown impulses creating subtle and varied situations.”<sup>6</sup> “Bhartrihari in his *Śṛṅgāraśataka*, shows himself well-acquainted both with charms of women and with the arts by which they captivate the hearts of men.

The devotional lyrics form a distinct class with two lines of development. We have on the one hand the ode-type *stotras* of a descriptive character. These highly impassioned poems express sense of self-surrender, love, repentance and blissful happiness in relation to the adorable deity. The personal note is present in both the lines of development. *Chandī-śataka* of Bāṇa Bhāṭṭa, *Bhakti-śataka* of Rāmachandra, *Ānanda-Lahari* by Śaṅkarācārya and many other *śatakas* and *stotras* were composed expressing deep devotion, personal ardour and passionate ecstasy.

The other line of development may be termed erotics-devotional poems represented by *Kṛṣṇa-Karṇāmṛita* of Vilvamangala and the *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva. The former is a collection of devotional lyrics in which Krishna is the object of the poet's prayer and praise. It is as series of masterly drawn pictures of Kṛṣṇa in relation to his *līlās* of Gokula and Brṇḍāvana. The sheer beauty and music of words and highly sensuous pictorial effect, authenticated by a deep sincerity of ecstatic passion, make it a finished product of lyric production. The *Gītagovinda*, both in its emotional and literary aspects, occupies a distinctive place in the history of Sanskrit poetry. Jayadeva prides himself upon elegance, softness and music of his poetic diction, as well as felicity and richness of his sentiment. The claim is neither unfounded nor extravagant. Many other erotics-devotional lyrics describing erotic-devotional relation of Gopis with Kṛṣṇa were written during the medieval period in soft and graceful style.

Lastly, we should take note of the historical Kāvya which have been treated not strictly on the basis of historical objectivity and sobriety but on poetical elaboration and exaggeration. In fact, the historical Kāvya are considered more a branch of poetry than as a sober narration of historical chronology and facts. *Rājataranginī* of Kalhaṇa, *Kumārapālacarita* of Hemachandra, *Vikramāṅkadevacarita* of Bilhaṇa, *Rāmapālacarita* by Sandhyākara Nandi and a few others written round about the first millennium A. D. contain many historical facts and events within the outward shell of poetic exaggeration and embellishment. The pure historical sense was alien to the ancient Indian mind.

<sup>6</sup> Dasgupta & Dey : *op. cit.* p. 473

With the fall of the Hindu supremacy and establishment of the Muslim rule the entire literary atmosphere underwent a radical change. Hinduism and Islam are, in some respects, radically different and as a result the Hindu religion was in a precarious conditions due to severe jolting given by the Muslim religion. Therefore, the Hindu saints, poets and reformers, in order to save their religion, considered the urgency of bridging the gulf between the two religions. They, therefore, reoriented the Hindu religion to cope with the new confronting situation. The popular polytheism was replaced by monotheism propounded in the ancient scriptures, the worship of image was discarded, caste differences were softened and the people at the lowest rung of the social ladder, so long deprived of the life of spiritual development, were gracefully invited to share the life of religious and spiritual development. Sincerity, devotion and self-surrender to the adorable diety were made touchstones of a religious life. Sanskrit was replaced by the newly emerging modern Indian languages as vehicles of religious propagation and literary expression. There was a sincere urge to educate the masses in respect of religion and culture through the media of regional languages. As a result, India witnessed efflorescence of regional literatures during the medieval period.

The two epics which formed the backbone of Indian culture were translated to almost all the Indian Languages by the end of the sixteenth century. Mādhava Kandali in Assam, Kṛttivāsa of Bengal, Tulsidāsa in Uttarpradesh, Kamban in Tamil Nadu, Balorām Dāsa in Orissa, Abhinava-Pampā in Kannada, to cite a few only, rendered the *Rāmāyaṇa* into their respective mother tongues. Similarly, the *Mahābhārata*, partly or entirely, was translated into different regional languages as a principal sources of mass edification and entertainment. Rāmasaraswatī in Assam, Kāsīdāsa of Bengal, Saralā Dāsa in Orissa, Pampā in Karnataka, Nannaya of Andhra, Villiputtur Alvar of Tamil Nadu and many others contributed towards the rendering of the *Mahābhārata* in to different modern Indian Languages.

Like the two epics, Purāṇas as the repositories of ancient Indian traditions, legends, religious beliefs, philosophical ideas and deeds and exploits of great Kings, received the attention of the regional scholars and poets. Of the numerous purāṇas, the *Bhāgavata-Purāṇa*, however, drew the utmost attention of the Vaisnavite Poets since the beginning of the fifteenth century when the Vaisnava renaissance movement reached the climatoric stage. Śaṅkaradeva in Assam, Mālādhara Basu of Bengal, Jagannātha Dāsa of Orissa,

Bāmmēra Patana of Andhra, Rāma Pannikar of Kerala and some later poets translated either fully or partially, the *Bhāgavata-Purāna* in their own languages in verse. Verse rendering of some other Purānas was also completed before the advent of the European powers in India.

The local versions of the epics and the Puranas are not exactly replicas of the originals. Besides deleting many episodes and narratives of the original sources, considerable deviations are noticed. They never failed to introduce local colour or local elements with a view to drawing sympathy from the local readers or listeners. Local stamp is patent in delineation of characters and narration of events, Local flora and fauna, customs and manners and way of life have been freely introduced in the midst of epic narratives. The poetic genius of some of the outstanding poets like Śaṅkaradeva, Saralā Dāsa, Pampā, Kōmban, Tulsidās and Surdās, scales new heights in depicting some of the crucial situations of their works. Nature in her variant moods and the beauty of changing seasons and its impact on human mind are beautifully portrayed in some of the descriptions of the medieval language-poets.

Besides the poetical work primarily based on translation and adoptions, the poets frequently composed *Kāvya*s based on imaginary themes glorifying the deeds and exploits of some purāṇic or epic characters. The names of some characters of such *Kāvya*s are borrowed from the Purānas, but the stories are inventions of the poet. The heroic *Kāvya*s known as the *Vadha-Kāvya*s in Assam and the *māhātmya-kāvya*s or *Maṅgal-Kāvya*s in Bengal may be cited in this connection.

It should, however, be noted in this connection that the poetical works of the medieval regional literature is mainly religious in tone. As the themes are mainly borrowed from the epics and the Purānas, they deal with superhuman exploits of gods, demi-gods and noble kings and warriors. The joys and sorrows of ordinary human being are scrupulously avoided ; humble deeds and scenes of every-day life have found no place in these works. Ordinary people are some times introduced for the sake of comic relief.

The crowning achievement of the medieval poets of regional literatures is the devotional lyrics. The *Bargītas* of Assam, *Padāvalis* of Bengal, *Bhajans* of Kabir, Surdas and Mirabai, *Divya-prabandham* and *Tevaram* of Tamil land, *Kīrtana-gītas* of Mithila, especially those of Vidyāpati, *Vacanas* and *Kīrtanas* of Karnataka, *Śatakas* of Andhra and *Abhaṅgas* of Mahārāstra are expressions of truly devoted mind tuned to



poetic expression. All these types of lyrics composed in the medieval period are meant to be sung to the accompaniment of some musical instruments. The lyrics teeming with poetic conceit and elevated thought are expressions of piety, sincerity and devotion to the adorable deity. Lyrics not only depict in elegant verses the personal charm and beauty of the adorable Lord, His divine power and compassion, but also at the same time express the sense of total surrender at the feet of God in body, mind and spirit. Poets express the feeling of exaltation to see the divine sports of the Lord in different incarnations in order to redeem the world of woes of the world. On the whole, the lyrics by saint-poets of the medieval India constitute a diadem in the decorative elements of the medieval Indian poetry.

The medieval poetry practically came to an end with the advent of the British rule in India. With the establishment of the British rule in India and with the introduction of the Western system of education the educated Indians came in contact with the Western literature, more particularly the English literature. Inspired by the English literature and imbued with the spirit of the new age the educated Indians began to cherish the idea of enriching their respective mother tongues with new types of literature modelled on the Western forms. The starting point of the new trends may roughly be placed in the early part of the nineteenth century, though in certain cases the date may be pushed back by fifty years earlier. The novel, the short story, essays and subjective lyrics were introduced in different India languages as a result of the popularity of the Western literature.

The English poets from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, especially the poets of the romantic period made a deep impression on the young men of the last quarter of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century. Under their inspiration they began to compose love lyrics, nature poetry, elegy, sonnet and ode in imitation of English poetry. Experiments with new meters in place of earlier conventional meters were carried on unabated and the blank verse, modelled after the English heroic verse, was introduced as a new medium of expressing narrative poetry. The romantic ideals of poetry widened their imaginative sensibility, added strangeness to their conception of beauty, intensified the love of Nature which came to be regarded as an entity having personality of her own, awakened the sense of respect for the past and unsophisticated life of the rural or pastoral society. Nature assumed a new dimension in their eyes and their imagination ran riot at the slightest provocation of the mind. The romantic movement conferred dignity on man as a man. The classical

poetry did not recognise the value of the life of the ordinary people. Under the influence of the romantic poets, the Indian poetry gained vitality, vigour and imaginative depth. There were innovation in rhythm, imagery and poetic diction. The new poetry sang of freedom from political dependence, social injustice and religious bigotry. Nature, in all her beauty and mystery revealed herself before the imaginative vision of the poets. Mysticism is an aspect of romanticism. The quest of the external beauty and truth in the midst of apparent diversity is the burden of many a poet of the romantic age.

The romantic tendencies in the Indian poets of the regional languages started manifesting in their writings from the last two decades of the nineteenth century and continued to rule the roost till the fourth decade of the current century. The exact year or time of emergence or disappearance may vary from language to language by fifteen or twenty years on either side, but the most fruitful period of the florescence of romanticism in all the languages is practically identical. To quote Dr. Radhakrishnan,—“There is a unity of outlook as writers in different languages derive their inspiration from a common source and face more or less the same kind of experiences, emotional and intellectual. Our country has never been insensitive to ideas which come from abroad but gives to all of them its own peculiar turn and imprint.”<sup>7</sup>

The rise of Michael Madhusūdan Dutt in the firmament of Bengali poetry in the second half of the nineteenth century ushered in the period of modern poetry in Bengali literature. Bengali poetry reached the pinnacle of glory in the versatile poetical affusion of Rabīndra Nāth Tagore. As it is not possible to mention within the limited compass of this discussion all the important poets and their contributions to different literatures ; only a few stalwarts of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries will be casually mentioned. Modern Oriya Poetry was initiated by Radhānāth Rāy and Madhusūdan Rāo towards the last quarter of the nineteenth century by introducing longer narrative poem of the epic style and short lyrics of the subjective type. Hindi poetry with modern sensibility did not mature till the advent of Maithilicharan Gupta in the second decade of the twentieth century. He was closely followed by Sūryakānta Tripāṭhāi and Sumitrānandan Pant and they pioneered the romantic movement in Hindi literature. The publication of Keshavśut's first series of poems in 1885 ushered in the modern

<sup>7</sup> Preface by S. Radhakrishnan to *Contemporary Indian Literature*, Published by Sahitya Akademi (1959).

trends in Marathi poetry. He experimented with new forms and diction and utilised poetry as a weapon of social reform. The full bloom of romantic tendencies in Kannada literature could be noticed during first three decades of the present century under the leadership of Bendre, B. M. Srikanthia and a few others. They produced poetry of remarkable loveliness. Malayalam Poetry of Kerala found enable exponents in two outstanding poets of the early twentieth century, viz. Kumaram Asan and Vallathol. They touched every subject of national importance and poured forth poems charged with emotion and sincere faith. Like Vallathol of Kerala, Subramanya Bhārati sings of the regeneration of India under Gandhiji. In his poems the worship of the motherland amounts to the worship of God. The modern trends in respect of creative literature in Assamese began to manifest in the writings of Chandrakumār Āgarwalā, Lakshmināth Bezbaroā and their compatriots who are credited with the publication of the monthly magazine Jonāki in 1889. They introduced subjectivity in Assamese poetry and imported personal lyrics, elegy, sonnet, parody and narrative poetry in the line of the romantic poetry of English literature.

Thus we find that modern poetry in most of the Indian literatures was initiated towards the close of the nineteenth or beginning of the twentieth centuries. Love, patriotism, nature-worship, mysticism, quest after beauty are some of the common themes in the poetical outpourings of the literatures. One oft-repeated criticism against the romantic poetry is its tendency to avoid the burning problems of life. This is why romantic poets have been branded as escapists. While admitting the above accusation as somewhat genuine, it must be said to the credit of the poets that they widened the horizon of poetic sensibility by endowing poetry with new vigour, depth, motives and values.

Towards the closing years of the fourth decade a counter poetical movement against the romantic exuberance was initiated by the younger generation of poets in most of the modern Indian literatures. It should be remembered in this connection that Marxian Philosophy and Freudian Psychology and 'Complexes' have exerted a great influence on the intellectual and mental attitude of the new generation of poets. While decrying the romanticists as escapists wallowing in the stream of luxurious imagination, a section of socio-political poets advocate a society free from political and economic exploitation and inequality. In contrast to the socio-economic group, there is another group who may be termed

socio-humanists. Technically they tried to link up their poetical utterances with various world movements and trends in literature, at the same time trying find a niche in their own tradition. The first group in Assamese literature emerged in the forties, while the second group, a larger one, made their existence known in the middle of fifties. In Bengal, this new school of poetry came to the surface in the thirties through the poetry of Biṣṇu De, Sudhindra Datta, Jibannānda Dās and Buddhadev Basu and Acintya Sengupta. In other regional literatures also this neo-romantic and some-times anti-romantic movement was started round about the second world war period. In Hindi literature it has been termed as *Prayogvadi* movement spearheaded by S.H. Vatsyana, Srikanta Verma and a few others. Similarly, in other modern Indian literatures the new intellectual school of poets raised the banner of protest and revolt against their immediate predecessor's approach to poetry, mode of treatment and style. The Older generation of poets, nevertheless, continued writing poetry along side the new school and some of them have been trying to adjust themselves with the new school.

As regards themes of the present-day poets, after independence, it must be admitted that they are more socio-economically conscious and more humanistic in approach than their predecessors. "While independence, partition of the country, influx of refugees, pangs of rehabilitation, Gandhiji's martyrdom, decline of the standards in public life, crisis in national character, gradual disappearance of the traditional values of life and frustration in the existing set-up of the society—all offered ready materials to the new generation of poets, the hope in the resurgent future is not totally lost. To quote from Bishnu Dey's 'Words' :

"Why falter poet ? There is hope yet.  
Here with your mind stilled in honesty  
Watch how the tractor moves true to its aim  
And the lathe rotates and turns out tools  
And crane in its world-wide dance throws up its arms.  
Here let your word keep time with the local dance." <sup>s</sup>

Though obsessed by the present day ills, the poets have not totally turned their back to the beauty of nature. However the pure Nature poetry is gradually receding to the background, though for the sake of imagery and symbols Nature is frequently used.

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<sup>s</sup> P.R.S. Iyengar (ed.) : *Indian Literature since Independence*, (1973) P.XIX.

As regards style and mode of expression of the modern poetry it may be said that the new poetry demands a new technique of expression. The new poets have discarded traditional rymed meters and popularised the vers libre, sprang verse and rhythmic prose. Symbolism, imagism, impressionism and sur-realism of European poetry have considerably influenced the style and technique of modern poets. Even the snap-shot quality of Japanese Haiku poetry has exerted some influence on a few poets. Besides T. S. Eliot and his contemporaries in England, continental poets like Franz Kafka, Baudelaire, Paul Valery, Stephen Mallarme, R. M. Rilke and Mayakovsky are read with avidity and their influence in determining the present trends cannot be ignored. As a result the traditional poetic conventions, imageries and logical sequence of thought are mostly discarded and are replaced by new images, symbols and allusions are either newly conceived or gleaned from the vast store-house of the world literature, capable of expressing the complexities of the modern mind. Of course, in many cases absence of logical sequence of thought and use of unfamiliar symbols and allusions lead to obscurity or intellectual snobbery. Recourse to sur-realistic modes of expressing the poet's individual sensibility lands the readers on an uncertain ground of vague realisation. The poetry of the modern poets, because of its intellectual bias, has only a limited appeal to a select band of readers.

Hope springs eternal in the human heart. The modern poet also sees the vision of a resurrected future as noticed in the following lines of the Assamese poet Navakanta Barua :

Heave a sigh or two—the blessed beloved traveller  
is ever on the way.

Let the seeping waters wash away the shells of  
dead spiders from the roof.

Let our silts make the two banks of Kalang fertile.

In the furrows of the new farms of our  
great grand-children,

We shall wake. In our fossils will they find  
The amusing tales of one who remembers the  
transmigrating past.

In the gutters that wash the dream-blind lane  
we live in,

Is their future.<sup>9</sup>

(silt)

<sup>9</sup> Quoted from *Indian Literature* Vol. XVIII No 1-2 p. 15



## SEMINAR REPORT

1. On the occasion of the 66th Annual Conference, held on September 23 & 24, 1978, the Samiti organised with the financial assistance from the Indian Council of Historical Research, a seminar on the "Socio-Cultural Life in Early and Mediaeval Period in the North Eastern Region of India." Several prominent scholars and Indologists took part in the proceedings where as many as nine papers throwing new light on the life and society of the period were read and discussed.

The Seminar which was inaugurated by Shri Lakshyadhar Choudhury, the then Education Minister of Assam, was conducted by Dr. V. B. Misra, Professor & Head of History Department, University of Gauhati, and was graced by Dr. Gaurinath Sastri, an eminent Sanskritist from Calcutta and Shri Benudhar Sarma, a front rank octogenarian historian from Assam. To mark the occasion an exhibition on painting was held, and a Souvenir volume of the Samiti's Journal Vol. XXIV was also brought out. It was concluded with a Cultural programme,

2. Another one-day periodical seminar was held under the auspices, of the Samiti on September 2, 1979. The subject for the seminar was "Royal Patronage of the Development of Art and Literature in Assam in the Early & Mediaeval Periods." The Seminar was conducted by Shri B. N. Shastri, the President of the Samiti. Several noted scholars took part in the proceedings. Shri Jugal Das presented an illuminating paper on Royal patronage and Assamese Painting which evoked enthusiastic discussion.

**D. CHUTIA**

Secretary,

Kāmarūpa Anusandhāna Samiti.

# KĀMARŪPA ANUSANDHĀNA SAMITI

( ASSAM RESEARCH SOCIETY ) :: GAUHATI—1

To

The Secretary, Kāmarūpa Anusandhāna Samiti, Gauhati.

Dear Friend,

I desire to be a Life/Full Member of the Kāmarūpa Anusandhāna Samiti and request you kindly to enrol me as such. I have gone through the aims and objects of the Samiti and accepted the same.

“The main object of the Samiti shall be to carry on researches in matters relating to History, Archaeology, Ethnography, etc. that is, all that usually come under the purview of a research Society, to publish a Journal and other works, and to collect books, manuscripts, coins, copper plates, statues, carved stones, anthropological articles etc., that is all things that should find their places in a library and a Museum of such a society ; and to organise Seminar, lecture, tour, to confer titles and to carry on such other activities in promoting the interest of the society.”

I shall abide by the rules of the Samiti and shall not do anything which may go against the interest of the Samiti directly or indirectly.

I am sending/remitting Rs. 15'00 ( Rupees fifteen ) / Rs. 105'00 ( Rupees one hundred five ) ( admission fee Rs. 5'00, & annual/life membership fee Rs. 10'00/Rs. 100'00, respectively ) only by Bankdraft/ Cash/Indian Postal Order for the purpose.

1. Full Name ( In block letters ) :
2. Present Address :
3. Permanent Address :
4. Occupation/Profession ( if any ) :
5. Age :

Date.....

Signature

\* Sponsored by

Member of the Executive Committee  
Kāmarūpa Anusandhāna Samiti, Gauhati

Admitted : vide Executive Committee's Resolution No.....Date.....

Ledger No.....

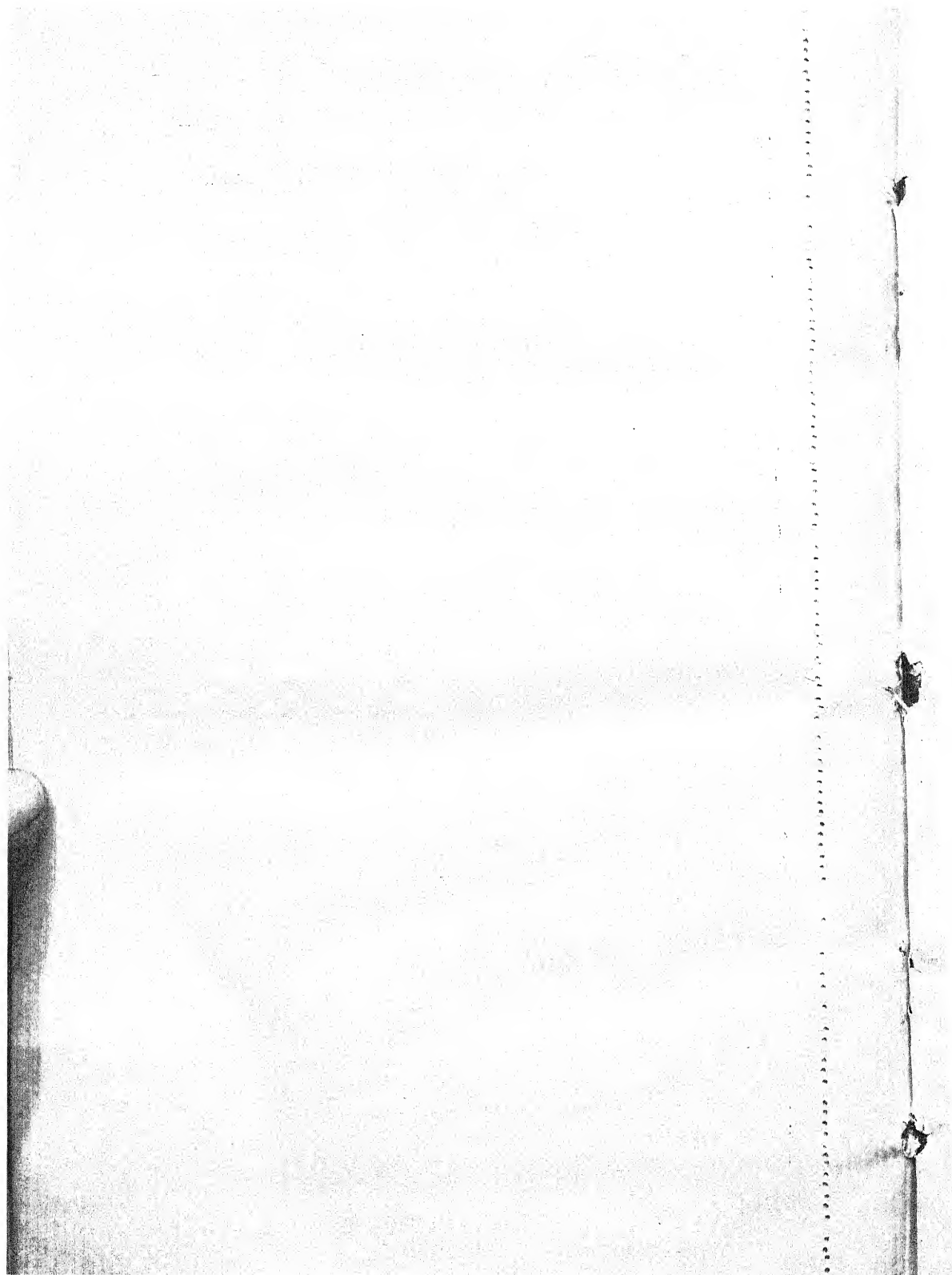
Book No.....

Receipt No.....

Secretary,

Kāmarūpa Anusandhāna Samiti

\* Applicable only in case of Life-membership.



## AN APPEAL

The Kāmarūpa Anusandhāna Samiti ( Assam Research Society ), was founded at Gauhati in April, 1912, by the noble efforts of some eminent and patriotic scholars to carry on research on matters relating to history, archaeology, ethnography and allied subjects, and to establish a muesum. The dream of these selfless workers was partially materialised when the Assam Provincial Museum (presently the Assam State Museum) at Gauhati, came into being in 1940 to which all the relics, save the books and manuscripts, collected by the Samiti were transferred. It may be recalled with pride and satisfaction that after the Asiatic Society, the Kāmarūpa Anusandhān Samiti is the first institution of its kind in the entire North Eastern India and its achievements are by no means less spectacular. The Samiti, in spite of many hadicaps, is able to keep aloft the banner of research in this part of the country.

But in recent times, the Samiti failed to make much progress as it should have for reasons beyond its control. The want of finance has handicapped the Samiti to a great extent in expanding its field of activities. Several schemes undertaken by the Samiti have to be kept in abeyance for the paucity of fund. Even the Samiti's research organ, viz. 'The Journal of the Assam Research Society', which was started in 1933 as a quarterly publication, has to be made an annual publication for want of liberal patronage. The Samiti is now proposing to publish the same quarterly from the next year provided there is some improvement in the financial position. The Samiti is also proposing to enlarge its sphere of activities—that it should cover studies not only on history, archaeology etc. but also other fields of humanities. Efforts are also being made to enroll more members who are actually interested in research and learning. The Samiti has also decided to accept Endowment and Trust Funds for publication of works and instituting memorial lectures. The Samiti will thankfully accept any sort of useful contributions.

It may be made known to our members and well-wishers that some of the books and journals, as also some manuscripts of the Samiti's library, are found to be missing during the time of our predecessors, which may be, we are sure, lying unnoticed with their borrowers. We make this earnest appeal to our well-wishers and member-borrowers to return the same, or convey any information leading to the recovery of the missing books, etc.

Off and on this learned voluntary institution had been receiving some journals and other publications from institutes both from within and outside the country. We have also received letters, requests regarding the back volumes of the Samiti's Journal and other publications and matters relating to research, etc. from various quarters. We are really very much grateful to those institutions and individuals who have all along shown their co-operation with this institution. But we feel sorry for our irregularity, if any, in correspondence. In fine, we appeal to the lovers of research and learning to extend their co-operation to us and make our endeavours a success.

*Secretary,*  
Kāmarūpa Anusandhān Samiti,  
Gauhati

**Publications of**  
**The Kāmarūpa Anusandhān Samiti**  
( Assam Research Society )

The Samiti offers to dispose of limited copies of some issues of the Journal of the Assam Research Society and other publications including the Padsah Buranji, allowing 15% discount, if ten or more copies are purchased at a time.

To be had of :

The Secretary,  
Kāmarūpa Anusandh  
Samiti, Gauhati-1